REFERENCE LIBRARY OF

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

2 PARK STREET, BOSTON

NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THE SHELVES

EXCEPT BY PERMISSION OF

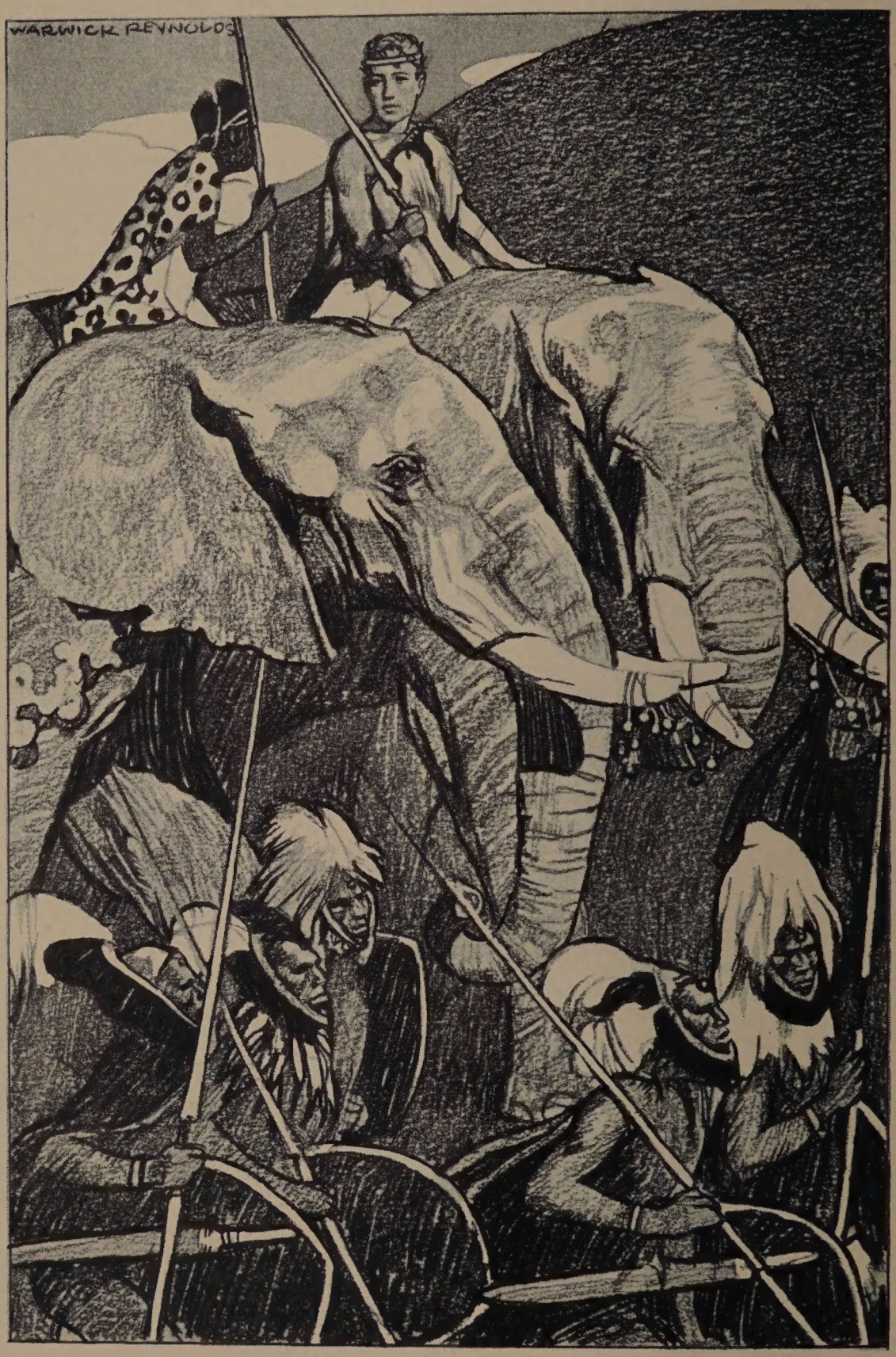
THE LIBRARIAN

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.

Archive
Collection

This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

Naju of the Nile



NAJU AND SANDWANA. See p. 270.

Frontispiece.

Naju of the Nile

By H. E. BARNS

With Sixteen Full-page Illustrations by
WARWICK REYNOLDS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
1924

First Published September 1924

Made in Great Britain by
THE BOTOLPH PRINTING WORKS
8, GATE STREET, KINGSWAY, W.C.2

TO

MY YOUNG FRIEND

LORENZO EMO

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	NAJU	1
II.	A GUARDIAN OF THE DEAD	22
III.	THE GREAT BLACK APES	41
IV.	THE MAN-EATERS OF SERAMANIS . . .	62
V.	UNTRIED WARRIORS AND THE LAST OF THE MAN-EATERS	84
VI.	IVORY ARMLETS OR A REWARD FOR VALOUR	107
VII.	THE LEOPARD'S PREY AND A REBEL CHIEF .	123
VIII.	MULIZI THE CHIEFTAINESS	144
IX.	A MEAN ACTION DRAWS FORTH A RED REVENGE	167
X.	ADVENTURES ON THE INLAND SEA . . .	181
XI.	KOLILO, CHIEF OF THE FISHERFOLK . .	199
XII.	THE MAGIC PLAINS	214
XIII.	OLDONJO, THE GIANT VOLCANOES . . .	230
XIV.	NGORO NGORO, THE FATHER OF ALL THE CRATERS	249
XV.	NAJU, KING OF THE CRATERS . . .	264

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
Naju and Sandwana . . .	*Frontispiece*
The King's Dancers	18
Naju's Farewell	24
Into the Waters	32
The Attack by Gorillas	52
Man-eaters	80
Two Lean, Tawny Streaks	94
Piga and the Twins	114
The Leopard's Prey	134
The Punishment	164
The Elephants' Bath	174
Adventure with a Hippopotamus . . .	184
Kolilo the Albino	204
Beyond the Camp Fire	224
The Wrath of the Elephants	238
"Greeting, O Sandwana!"	260

CHAPTER I

Naju

Boom! Boom!! Boom!!!

No mere village tom-toms these, whose deep, thudding throbs smote the ear with a volume of sound and carried their message to the widely scattered villages. No rattle of a badly stretched gut broke the rich harmony, for even one false note brought down swift and sure punishment on the player's head.

Little fear was there however of such a thing happening, for to-day were they not calling in the people to a carnival, and when Dungundega, King of the Ruanda, gave one of his rare festivities, every member of the vast household, from the master of the drums down to the tiniest slave in the royal cookhouses, had determined to enjoy their share.

Down the narrow, smoothly trodden tracks leading from the villages perched on the tops and sides of the surrounding hills, poured the subjects of this mighty King.

From near and far they came. The young and the old, the halt and the blind. All who could walk or crawl along, and even those who had journeyed from their homes on the far-distant

borders of the kingdom, counted as nothing the long weary marches to reach the King's kraal.

Up the wide road to the compound they flocked, a merry babbling stream, for this, be it known, was no ordinary celebration, but one given by their King to speed the departure of his favourite son on a long, long journey.

The vast kingdom over which Dungundega ruled was one of the richest in the land, not rich, that is, in gold or silver, but overflowing with subjects and teeming herds of cattle. Many generations before this story opens a tribe known as the Mutuzi, of a high caste race, marched away from the barren sandy wastes of the Blue Nile and, descending on the pastoral Ruanda, conquered the savage tribes inhabiting it, installing themselves as rulers.

Their caste forbade them to intermarry with their slaves; thus the race remained pure, and the present-day Mutuzi rulers are just as tall and slim, with features as finely chiselled, as their Nilotic ancestors.

Dungundega, the King, was a true and worthy descendant of his forefathers. That his six elder half-brothers had been murdered that he might inherit the throne was in no way due to him, but to the fact that his mother was the wisest and at the same time the most cruel of his father's many wives.

Whilst he was still of tender age she determined that her son, and her son only, should be King. In her brother, a man as cruel and arrogant as herself, she found a very able fellow conspirator.

Together they plotted and planned, and the unfortunate sons of the other members of the harem one by one faded and died, and in this way Dungundega came to his throne. Happily he possessed no strain of his mother's cruel nature and was a kind though a firm and just ruler.

Being a devout lover of all four-footed creatures and nature in general, he would gladly have bartered the half of his kingdom for just one spell of freedom, to wander at will through the land and see its many wonders with his own eyes. But alas, he had fain to content himself with the tales brought to him by travellers through his country, for amongst the many other superstitions handed down through the generations of these noble chiefs, two there were which applied to him, the King, alone.

So ancient were these superstitions that their origin had long been lost in the dim past, but the first of them said, "That should you as King pass a certain mountain then will you lose your inheritance, for it will be wrested from you." Then again, said superstition number two, "Should you cross this stream you will be stricken with blindness." In this narrow radius, for the fatal mountain and the stream were a mere two days' march away from each other, Dungundega had perforce to stay and content himself as best he could.

Whilst still a young man, although already possessing three wives, he took yet a fourth one into his harem, and that Aruscha, the youngest daughter of one of his greatest chiefs. Aruscha, of the slim body, sable satin skin, and dark velvety eyes, quickly became the King's favourite. She

retained his love and admiration for the rest of her life, for not only was she beautiful but gracious of manner and full of quiet sympathy.

In the second year of her life at court Aruscha gave birth to a son, and they named him Naju, meaning the fourth or the poor son.

Now at this time there lived in the royal compound an aged Swahili called Saigilo. Part doctor, part prophet, he was altogether a most clever man, and by his superior knowledge and cunning had won for himself the most famous position in the land, that of chief adviser to the King.

When Aruscha gave birth to her child Saigilo set himself seriously to think the thing out, for by his former wives Dungundega possessed already three other sons. Then this son of the fourth and most dearly beloved wife must perforce in later years become a nonentity, a mere hanger-on at the court, for very little prospect was there that he would ever inherit the throne—hence the reason of his being named Naju.

"But," said Saigilo to himself, "the offspring of two such noble parents is surely worthy of a greater future than that of a mere idler. True it is that these noble Mutuzi are cramped and hemmed about by the ancient superstitions of their race, but I can think of none that interfere with the freedom of a fourth son."

One night, when the rest of the court lay silent and asleep, Saigilo sat himself down by the side of a small log fire in the middle of his dwelling resolved to solve this problem once and for all. It was long after the drums had boomed out the hour of

midnight that he heaved a sigh of satisfaction and stretched himself down to sleep with a mind at ease.

Early the following day he requested an audience of the King, and this was quickly granted him, for, unlike many other of the parasites around the court, Saigilo was a man who never wasted words or talked for the pleasure of hearing his own voice. Therefore when the request came for a private audience, quite confident was Dungundega that he was about to hear something of importance.

Through the low door of the King's private dwelling hut, into the cool, dark, mat-hung chamber passed Saigilo and, having first salaamed to Dungundega, sat himself down cross-legged on the mat in front of him.

"Your Majesty," he said, "it is many a long year now since first you considered my poor advice on the affairs of your state worthy of acceptance, but that is not all, for out of your kind heart have you also permitted me to take a close share in the intimate affairs pertaining to the royal household. You will not therefore I pray take it as presumption on my part when you have heard that which I am about to lay before you.

"As it also closely concerns Aruscha, the fourth and most beautiful of your Majesty's wives, would it not be as well if she were called to hear for herself what I am about to say?"

Dungundega turned to a waiting slave. "Hurry to the apartments of the royal ladies," he said, "and tell the slaves of the Princess Aruscha that I desire her presence here at once."

Only a very few seconds elapsed before the tall,

gracious but closely veiled woman entered the chamber with a soft musical jingle of ornaments.

Dungundega rose, and taking her by the hand, led Aruscha to a low skin-covered divan and there sat down beside her.

"Now," he said, "we are waiting to hear what it is you have to tell us."

"I am greatly concerned," began Saigilo, "with the future of the little lad Naju, your son, for in my eyes it is a thousand pities that the child of your Majesty and the Princess Aruscha has nothing better to look forward to in the future than a life of useless idleness here at the royal court, for with three brothers all older than himself the chances are indeed slight that he will ever inherit the throne.

"Now I am as well acquainted with the many ancient customs and superstitions of the noble race to which you belong as you yourself, your Majesty, and for a Prince of the royal blood to leave his home and journey through the land has never before been even thought of. But again, if your Majesty agrees to my plan I see no reason why in this case an exception should not be made.

"Let us imagine that instead of being left to the care of weak women slaves, and pampered and spoilt, he should be taken away from them at an early age and from that time on attended only by men, and men too especially picked from amongst your Majesty's subjects who would by their very example teach him to become a brave and strong man, fearing nothing and able if need be to live by his spear, and not alone to look upon it as a mere adornment.

"How often have I heard your Majesty deplore the fact that you are unable to leave your kingdom and journey into the great unknown to see for yourself the wonderful things of which you have heard.

"Now, I am aware of no custom or superstition that would stand in the way where your fourth son is concerned; why therefore should he not go instead of you and make use of his eyes and senses to observe those things which you have so longed to know. It might even come to pass that once away from the softening effects of court life, free and independent, he would find and carve out for himself a niche in the great outside world worthy of his blood and race."

Having until now sat intently listening, Dungundega rose to his feet. "It is indeed strange," he said, "that all unasked you should approach me on a subject so near to my heart. Ever since the birth of this small son of mine have I puzzled my brains to try and plan out a future worthy of the child of my most beautiful wife, but beyond placing him as chief over a portion of my kingdom no other way has so far presented itself to me.

"How infinitely more noble and desirable is the plan you have laid before us. For my own part, and that without a moment's hesitation, I accept it, but there still remains for the Princess, his mother, to give her consent."

"And that I do most willingly, here and now," said Aruscha in her soft, low voice, "but," she added, "that my son may not become altogether too callous to the softer influences of life, I insist

that I too be given my share in the moulding of his character."

That very day saw the beginning of a new era for the tiny, serious-eyed Naju, for he was rudely taken from the warm naked back of a devoted female slave, where up to now, slung in a soft, long-wooled sheepskin, he had slept existence away.

His new male nurses wasted no time in caresses or carrying him around, but spreading a mat down on the ground, left him to spend days kicking and squealing in the sunshine whilst they kept careful guard near by. But being a strong lusty infant, he thrived amazingly on this hardy treatment. On a diet of rich cow's milk and bananas he shot up as rapidly as the rubber saplings planted around the borders of his father's domain.

As soon as he grew strong enough to hold them, tiny spears and bows and arrows were moulded for his use, and he was taught how to handle these weapons by the best bowmen the country boasted.

Owl-eyed pygmy men, skilled in the art of tracking, were brought from far away to teach him to read and follow the footmarks of bird, beast and man, and he inherited from Dungundega a love of nature and animals, and craved earnestly to find out all there was to know about them.

Thus, when he reached the age of fourteen, he was a lad to make glad the heart of his royal parents, and as he now knew all that it lay in their power to teach him, they judged the time ripe for him to start away on his journey of adventure.

Sixty of his father's biggest and strongest slaves

were chosen to go with him as a bodyguard and eight other strong men had been specially trained to carry the long wicker palanquin, that however would only be used in case of sickness or mauling by wild beasts, for in his young strength Naju scorned the idea of being carried on men's shoulders like a woman.

Four of the best cooks from the royal cookhouses, assisted by six small slaves, whose duty it would henceforth be to light the fires and clean the earthenware cooking vessels, were also to accompany him.

Two red-skinned pygmy trackers, Amani and Amisi, had taken a last admiring look at the piles of gleaming spears and mighty bows and arrows that would from now on be their especial care.

In his father's hut, listening to a final word of advice from his father, stood Yidahonga, Saigilo's eldest son. For it was he who had been chosen from amongst all others to accompany the King's son on his travels. To go, first as his friend and, if occasion arose, as his adviser.

Throughout the length and breadth of Dungundega's kingdom there existed no finer specimen of manhood than this twenty-year-old calm-eyed son of Saigilo with his thick ox-like neck, narrow hips, noble chest and shoulders with their play of tangled muscles. From his slave mother he inherited the broad features of his face and a wide mouth filled with strong glistening teeth, the two front ones filed to a point. Hair as an adornment he scorned, and his pate shone as bare as an ostrich egg, whilst the brown, hairless skin of his body

glistened like silk, so thoroughly had it been rubbed with butter. With the brayed skin of an ox slung from his shoulder and carrying in his hand a mighty bow with a sheath of arrows, he looked truly a powerful and fearless warrior.

Nor was that all, for from his father he inherited the far-seeing cunning Arab brain of the Swahili races, and although so young, had already proved himself of great assistance to his parent, and therefore to the King himself, when they were hard driven to sift the diamond of truth from the enveloping matrix of court lies. And now at this instant his father had again pointed out, for at least the hundredth time it seemed to him, how serious was his position. "For," ended Saigilo, "you and you alone are responsible for the safe return of the Prince. Should anything happen to him it would be far better that you die on your own spear rather than come back without him. But if, when he wishes to return, you bring him safely back, then any position you may choose to demand as your just reward will be granted you by the King."

Yes, the responsibility was a grave one without doubt; but as he left his father's dwelling the mind of the young Swahili was filled with other and quite different things, for to celebrate their departure at dawn on the third day, Dungundega had commanded his subjects to a feast and dance, the most sumptuous that had been known for many years.

And so from early dawn until now the mid-day hour—boom—boom—boom—boom went the King's

drums, beating out their message to his subjects to come in their thousands.

Across the broad sun-scorched compound strode Yidahonga to where, in the midst of a wide circle of the most important of the chiefs, stood the King with Naju by his side.

Even amongst that assembly of tall men Dungundega towered head and shoulders above the rest; clad as he was in a straight toga of rich brown bark cloth, clasped at the shoulders with heavy falling raffia tassels, he was an arresting and commanding figure.

By his side stood Naju, every inch a Prince of the blood, bidding fair to outgrow even his royal sire. True to his race was this young warrior, each feature of his face clear-cut and finely chiselled and with the big glowing earnest eyes of Aruscha, his mother. A farewell gift from her too was the long supple leopard skin cloak he wore slung from his shoulder.

Outside the growing barrier of rubber trees, enclosing and hiding the royal dwellings from the eyes of the curious, the crowds surged around the spits where roasted whole carcasses of oxen, sheep and goats. In the opening of the royal enclosure now appeared two slaves dragging between them a gigantic drum on which they beat a rousing tattoo, for the feast of the chiefs awaited their coming.

Led by Dungundega, the slim graceful Mutuzis filed slowly out to their banqueting ground, where, in a cool shady place a patch of ground had the previous day been plastered with liquid mud; on this now dry smooth surface a triangle of woven

matting lay spread. Waiting only until his guests had arranged themselves in circles on the mats, Dungundega turned away and passed with his sons across to the privacy of his own chamber, for again superstition stepped in and decreed that no Mutuzi ruler must be seen to eat by any but those of royal blood. Many were the noble princes, who, imprisoned for some political offence, died rather than be seen to eat one mouthful of food by their plebeian guards.

To the seated chiefs first came little lads carrying bowls of clear cold water, for strictly clean must be the hand that conveys the food from the vessels to the mouth. Coal-black female slaves, nude but for a strip of fine raffia cloth around their loins, staggered beneath the weight of deep earthenware bowls of savoury potage, concocted from bullocks' hearts, livers and kidneys, and fragrant with cardamums and chillies. Then followed other equally delicious viands. Tender young cockerels, cooked in milk and garnished with cream, rimmed around with slices of crisp cucumbers. Thick steaks of fat red meat sizzling and hot from the fire and still impaled by the ivory skewers on which they had been baked. Shallow baskets piled high with foaming white rice, yams sweet and floury, platters of gay-coloured pumpkins, cakes of rice flour crisped and browned in butter, and the first tender young mealies of the season nestling in their own tightly folded husks.

After the meats in due course came the fruits of the land, gigantic bunches of chocolate and golden bananas, perfumed pau-paus, sliced and laid side by side with luscious melons.

But there comes a moment, even at a court banquet, when, no matter how tempting the viands, not another mouthful can be eaten. Having reached this happy stage, Dungundega's guests with loud sighs rose from the mats and filed slowly back into the royal enclosure.

Altogether too fine and fragrant, the wine distilled from the bananas, to be mixed with the grosser flavours of food! To really test its delicate aroma it must needs be sipped slowly through a straw from a comfortable lolling position on the ground. Therefore as the chiefs passed in at the open portals, waiting slaves handed to each of them a slender straw. They crossed over to where Dungundega and his sons awaited their coming, finding there also gourd upon gourd of the foaming wine, sweetened with wild honey and ranged around a vast pile of finely shredded golden tobacco with a new brown earthenware pipe for every guest. Too well known to need repeating was the rule that no man would be permitted to leave the company until that pile had been smoked, but on this rare occasion no one evinced the faintest wish to steal away, so much was there to be discussed about the approaching journey. True it was that as the evening advanced the remarks were often at random and far from the point; still, that may or may not have been due to the frequency with which the wine gourds circled round!

Down the sides of the hill, along the valley at its foot, dotted everywhere, twinkling log fires lit up the darkness, and in the warm red glow the multitude of Dungundega's subjects sat and lay

on the ground. To them at midnight, as well as to the festive company within the compound, came the command of silence, and it was a brave man indeed who would dare to utter a sound after that solemn warning.

Deep and soft boomed out the first rolling notes of the drums, louder and louder rose the throbbing beats and the soft night breeze carried them away to the mountains, where they echoed and rumbled through the valleys.

More poignant than ever would be the regret of any poor unfortunate individual who through sickness or other misfortune found himself unable to attend this never-to-be-forgotten carnival of feasting and dancing, for on this auspicious occasion the best-known dancers from all over the country had been commanded to perform. No light, frolicsome pastime this dancing of theirs to these savage children of nature, but the only medium known to them of portraying their changing emotions. Let a man be born—then with swaying bodies and stepping feet they sang of their joy; and again when he died—the same rhythmic measure expressed their grief.

So eager were the multitude to make the most of every moment of the anticipated joy that as the dawn broke the following morning, whilst the grass sagged heavy with its weight of dew, they trooped in their hundreds up the broad road and in at the entrance to the dancing-ground. Once inside the wide, sun-swept oval came a mad scamper for the best places from which to view the dancing. Old or young, everyone for himself was the rule,

and in this case, as always, the youngest and weakest went to the wall whilst the strongest and boldest seated themselves comfortably in the best places.

To while away the time until the King should appear the mothers babbled shrilly between themselves as they suckled insatiable infants, and the fathers, smoking their pipes, gossiped quietly to their neighbours of the rains, the crops and the herds. But the babble of sound hushed to silence as Dungundega, the King, accompanied by his sons and a long string of attendant chiefs, passed in at the entrance and across to the raised dais at the far end.

The eyes of the multitude, young and old alike, eagerly watched the tall, calm, splendid figure, for only on such rare occasions as the present did he appear openly in their midst. Not a sound broke the stillness until he had seated himself with his four tall slender sons and the noble chiefs standing in their places at the back and on either side.

Then up rose every man in that vast assemblage, waving aloft his spear or staff.

"A thousand greetings, O King!" roared out the deep-throated voice of the multitude.

Rising again to his feet, Dungundega, with a smile on his face, stood with his spear held aloft in answer to the greeting and remained thus until the cheering died away to a murmur.

Then through a concealed opening came the first of the dancers. Clad only in brown and white sheepskins, each carrying in his hand a gleaming polished hoe, fifty sturdy peasants padded silently, for on the soft mudded floor naked feet made no

sound, up to within a few paces of the King. The spectators held their breath as the heavy hoes whirled glistening into the air and then spun down again to be deftly caught midway as their owners, with a shrill yell, leapt high to meet them. As ancient as the hills this Dance of the Hoes, but it never failed tc thrill its audience, and was ever a popular item, for the element of danger is decidedly great, and many a hand has been chopped right off by a clumsy or reckless performer. On this occasion however the heavy hoes spun and were caught, and no severed members fell to the ground, for a wounded performer is a disgraced one and never again considered worthy to appear before his King.

Their performance ended, the fifty men trooped out, and to take their place came twenty others each with a mighty drum slung from his waist on a single rheim. Round in a circle they slowly revolved, beating a soft rolling measure, but as the tune quickened and became louder so they spun round faster and faster until man and drum merged into one huge spinning top, and to add to the pandemonium the spectators in their excitement stamped and yelled. But human endurance must come to an end, and so in this case softer and slower became the measure until it died away to a murmur and the performers were again standing in their places with heaving chests and streaming bodies.

Only a solitary performer this next who now enters the circle. A piece of life-like mimicry his, of the slim-legged, slow-moving crested cranes who sometimes in pairs but more often in droves haunt the edges of the warm soggy marshes, and

even the humid, freshly hoed plantations, searching for fat locusts.

Every stage in the life of this beautiful bird the audience watched, from the day when, as a weak-kneed lanky fledgling, he wanders away from the parental nest and lurches unsteadily forth to see what the world holds in store for him. And his very first experience is an evil one in the shape of a thousand-spotted, velvet-padded serval cat, whose sleek head appears suddenly up over the thick grass at his side and regards him with greedy yellow eyes. So astonished he at this startling apparition that without giving a thought to whether they might bear him or not, he spreads his as yet untried wings and floats away under the very nose of the watching cat.

His next adventure is a warlike one, for, spying a drove of his own kind down beneath him and feeling lonely up there in the air, he sees no earthly reason why he should not join forces with them. But the young cock birds of the flock think otherwise, and he is hard put to it to defend himself. But he refuses to be driven forth and follows doggedly on their heels; at last, seeing that he shows no special predilection for the hens, he is allowed to stay. But when the mating season comes round again he too is anxious to win for himself a beautiful wife, so together with the other young "bloods" of the flock, wings outspread, he steps and dances round and round as gaily as the rest. Having at last gained his end, the two together rise from the earth and with glad calls of victory float away in search of pastures new.

From dawn until noon, one following another, the habits good and bad of bird, beast and even reptile were shown to the insatiable audience, but they never wearied, and the principal event of the day is still eagerly awaited!

At last they come—the King's Dancers—sixty of them if a man, and each the blue-blooded son of a chief. Hushed to stillness are the audience as they enter with a silvery tinkle of minute metal bells slung on a slender rheim to their ankles. Arrayed alike in the soft white skins of antelopes, the deep fringes of which reach to the ground, on their heads a circle of floating snowy aigrette plumes and each of them armed with a gleaming copper spear. Two by two, from side to side of the arena, they range, whilst from amongst the crowd, where up to this moment he had sat unnoticed, rises the songster, he who with his sing-song chanting gives the only measure for the dancers, as one by one they emerge in front of all, and with swaying bodies, leering faces and slow gestures, run through the gamut of all human passion—love, jealousy, hatred and death. No silly shyness spoils the unstudied grace of the artists, and through it all the musical tinkle-tinkle of tiny bells beating out the time, and for the finale one simultaneous deep-throated yell as the dancers leap high into the air, throw down their spears with a noisy jangle, and prostrate themselves flat on the ground.

This too the finale of that day of pageantry, for now the King rises to his feet and, stepping down from the dais, passes through a maze of up-raised spears and thus out from the dancing-ground.

THE KING'S DANCERS.

Facing p. 18.

Barely had the dawn broken on the third and last day of Dungundega's carnival when his drums again called the people. But in an opposite direction to the royal compound they wended their way to-day, for the tournament ground must needs be far and away from any human habitation, or perchance a stray arrow might find an unsuspected target.

In the centre of the ground towered an ancient Baobab tree whose pierced and scarred trunk told of the many scores of times it had served as a target, for its soft pithy wood barely dulled the finest edge of the weapons aimed into it.

A veritable war of rivalry raged unending between the noble chiefs and their sons as to who could throw a spear the straightest and farthest or aim an arrow the truest.

So, to-day, stripped to the waist, legs far apart, feet firmly planted on the ground, the lithe Mutuzi gritted their teeth and stretched their mighty bows to the uttermost while the darts whined through the air and more often than otherwise struck the target with a dull thud.

Matched against each other too were the heroes of the forthcoming venture, and how keenly was the contest between them watched and wagered on.

The slender body of Naju, the King's son, tautened to a bar of tempered steel as he sent the arrows thudding into the very middle of the drawn circle as a test of his marksmanship. And no truer than that could the muscular ox-necked Swahili, Yidahonga, speed his darts. Also in throwing the lance it was judged that the heavier weight of

the young Swahili must count; but no, many a fat steer or sleek heifer changed owners as the result of lost wagers when Naju's spears were found to have travelled as far and even farther than Yidahonga's.

Here ended the serious events of the day's revelry, for that which followed was a mere game, but played, nevertheless, with true and ardent zest. And for this game some of the very tallest from amongst the slaves were chosen, and three of them placed close together in a row.

The first to dart away from a long string of young Mutuzis lined up in readiness for the event was Naju himself; nude like his comrades, excepting for a strip of loincloth, he sped across the ground, leapt high and flew like a bird over the heads of the three grinning slaves, landing clear on the other side. Quickly on his heels, one after another, came the rest with barely time to draw breath between the jumps, and when the last of them had passed, yet another slave was added to the other three, and over their four heads again sailed the jumpers.

The fun waxed fast and furious as slave after slave was added, until eight stood wedged together. Here the weakest of the jumpers fell out, for only the strongest and most agile could hope to clear such a barrier.

Overhead from out of a sky of cloudless blue King Sol poured down his scorching rays, and the hot dry dust rose in clouds, parching the throats of the revellers. Fortunately, at this moment drawing quickly nearer, came a long string of

slaves, carrying on their heads deep black vessels of banana wine. These were quickly snatched from their hands whilst a rough and noisy battle waged for the first long drink. The unfortunate losers watched with greedy eyes as the winners sought to swallow in the least possible time as much of the cool sweet-acid beer as they could, but when the parched watchers could no longer bear the sight, by force they wrested the pots away and with loud gulps poured what remained of the precious liquid down their throats with such greediness and haste that thin trickles of the liquid escaped through each corner of their mouths.

CHAPTER II

A Guardian of the Dead

ALONE in her cool and darkened chamber sat Aruscha, Naju's mother.

Hour after hour, beginning with the very early dawn, until now, the hour of sunset, the babble and din from the tournament ground floated in at the open door, and she prayed earnestly that it soon might cease, for every throb of the drums reminded her afresh that on the morrow she must lose her only and idolised son.

Very soon after her entry into the royal harem had she learnt the bitter lesson that to be the favourite wife of a king brings many trials and penalties in its train.

Timid, warm-hearted and sympathetic, she at first tried bravely by every means in her power to win the friendship and liking of the other members of the harem, only to be met with coldness and rebuffs. By forming friendships amongst themselves from which she was coldly excluded, and by their veiled insolent taunts, they wounded the tender heart of this innocent victim of their jealousy. The proud spirit of her early Egyptian ancestors forbade that she utter one word of complaint to Dungundega, and she soon discovered a

mantle of cold reserve to be the most effective weapon against the jeers of her enemies.

Of friends outside the court circle she possessed none, for her mother and sisters lived many days away, neither could they visit her, for they too were bound hard and fast in the tyrannical throes of yet another custom decreeing that no Mutuzi lady may be seen by any but those of her own blood. As to travel through the country without being seen was out of the question, once in the harem there perforce they had to remain until the end of their days.

The weaving of beautiful fabrics and plaiting of exquisite food vessels that so pleasantly occupied the time of the other women failed to interest her, and Dungundega, as ruler over so vast a kingdom, was by far too occupied to spend much of his time in her presence.

Surrounded by the luxury of the court, with a slave to do her every bidding, she was with it all a lonely, friendless woman, weary with the dull monotony of an unoccupied life.

Much as she yearned for other children, only the one son had been born to her, and on him she lavished the love of a starved heart. But here again little had been left for her to do, for the greater part of Naju's time had been spent with the men who were training and fitting him for his future life of adventure.

The time had now come when she must lose him, the one living precious thing she could call her own. A tiny bitter smile curved her lips at the irony of her fate. She, the favourite of the

King, the most envied of her world, would rather a thousand times be the wife of a peasant, happily occupied from morning to night, with a crowd of little friendly children playing and bickering around her knees.

She breathed a deep sigh of relief when at last the rattle of the drums and babble from the tournament ground died away, and midst a riot of blazing colours the sun sank to rest behind the distant hills and the peace and calm of the evening settled down. To the silent-footed slaves carrying in the evening meal she paid no heed, and leaving the viands untouched, passed out of the chamber into the soft velvety dusk, where, safe from the jealous prying eyes of the other women, the tears rolled unchecked down her cheeks.

Here it was that Naju found her when, having stolen away from the crowd of guests, he came to spend these last few hours with her.

Side by side beneath a bower of pau-pau trees, laden with their wealth of wax-like fragrant blossoms, the two tall slender figures paced silently.

Of the grief rending her heart at the nearby parting, this proud and true daughter of a long line of chiefs uttered no word, nor could mere empty phrases have told the serious-eyed youth by her side more than he already realised of the aching loneliness, the weary monotony, of his mother's enforced and secluded existence.

What the world might hold of good in store for him he had yet to find out, but come what would, there and then he vowed that at some not

NAJU'S FAREWELL.

Facing p. 24.

far distant date this beautiful mother of his should be free to lead whatever life best suited her wishes. Taking her by the shoulders, he turned her round and gazed deeply into the eyes so like his own but now misty with unshed tears.

"Listen, mother," he said, "for what I am about to say concerns you very closely. Whilst Dungundega, my father, remains alive your life here is at least a safe and sheltered one, but come a day there must when the son of one of these other women will perforce inherit the throne. When, many years ago, the old Swahili, Saigilo, prophesied that nothing would then remain for me but to become an idler at the court, he spoke only too truly. But listen, mother, never will I submit to so ignoble a fate, for somewhere in this wide world, be it great or small, I will found a kingdom of my own and live as ruler, not as the paltry chattel at another man's court! When that time comes you also, mother, shall be given your choice and the age-old superstitions of our tribe shall be set at naught, if, when I return, you decide to leave this living death and come away with me to my new kingdom!"

Aruscha listened amazed as these brave words fell from the mouth of her son, for when thinking and planning out his future, never for one moment had it ever entered her head that she might be asked to share it with him. But of one thing she now became very certain, that should the fates be kind and bring him safely through the many dangers ahead and help him to obtain the desired end, then would she be no less brave, but once and for all

break away from the ancient superstitions of her race. Placing her hands on his shoulders, she gazed into his face.

"May the gods be good to you," she said, "and help you speedily to obtain the new kingdom of which you have so bravely spoken. Rest assured, my son, when that time does come you will find me ready and eagerly waiting to go with you into freedom. Now bid me farewell, for it is unlikely that I shall see you again before you set out to-morrow at dawn."

Brimming over with youth and health, free and untrammelled as the air he breathed and able to wander where he listed, this fortunate Prince was indeed born under a lucky star.

Rising each day with the dawn, tireless, and revelling in the beauties of this new and wonderful world around, he strode on at the head of a winding string of chattering slaves, with the calm-eyed Swahili, Yidahonga, ever close at his heels. On and away they went over range after range of mighty mountains, to the far borders of Dungundega's kingdom.

Let the eyes roam where they would—down in the valleys, up on the hills—grazed the wealth of the country, the vast sleek herds of cattle. The nude dusky herdsmen, leaning on their staffs, gazed at the passing strangers with eyes as wide and timid as the cattle they guarded. Each day, on ahead, was sent a runner to warn the chiefs of the largest kraals to make ready to receive this son of the King, and thus it came about that at the

end of the long weary marches, when they passed in between the dwellings, the villagers, courteous men and merry women, flocked to greet this royal guest and his large following and ransacked the plantations to provide of their best for him.

They were a generous and hospitable people, these stalwart Barundis who had in the long ago settled happily and contentedly down under the rule of their conquerors, the Mutuzi. Very rarely used and merely carried as an adornment or a relic from the past, were the long spears without which no man was ever seen to move ten paces away from his dwelling.

Of the great carnivora, the Kings of the Forest, not a sign was to be seen, not a pug mark broke the smoothness of the winding sandy tracks, wherefore the vast herds of cattle spent the nights unfenced and unguarded, to wander at will between the tall banana stems.

But on the twentieth day came the end of this region of grass-clad mountains and also of Dungundega's kingdom. An abrupt ending, for Naju and his followers now found themselves overlooking a steep scarp. At the immensity and grandeur of the awe-inspiring scene stretching out ahead of them they stood aghast and marvelled at this first evidence of the colossal forces of Mother Nature, the like of which they had never before even dreamed about.

Near and far, in every conceivable shape and form, indomitable and immovable, towered vast volcanoes. Some there were age-old as the world itself, clothed from peak to base in a mantle of dense impenetrable forest. Others again, of recent

age, lay sullen heaps of grey and black lava, their sides rent by gaping fissures where the molten lava, in its eagerness to escape, had burst the earth's crust asunder. Two others there were whose towering heads stood above all the rest and whose tapering peaks lay still and cold beneath a mantle of glittering snow.

But the one that struck awe into the hearts of Naju's simple bearers was a colossal monster, solitary and alone, whose mouth belched forth dense volumes of black smoke that ascended in a straight column besmirching the pure fleece-white clouds that drifted overhead, whilst from its lip oozed a flow of boiling liquid mud.

As he gazed from the mountain of fire down to the deep rifts and lava plains beneath, Naju wondered who and what were the race of people daring to live with this menace of instant destruction for ever hanging over their heads, for sprinkled about around the feet of this same fiery monster grew dark banana groves between which peeped the grey roofs of many a nestling village.

The day was already far advanced, and the nearest of these habitations still many hours away; so having gazed their fill at the wonders before them, down over the side of the scarp they went, picking their way very carefully, for the loosened rocks and stones that went hurtling away beneath told of the fate in store in the event of even one false step. But strong and agile-footed were these hardy mountaineers, and safe and sound they came at last to an overhanging ledge whose flat top at least promised a sheltered resting-place for the

night. Out of the rocks overhead gushed a stream of ice-cold water which, gathering itself into a deep pool, spilled out over the opposite side and thundered unchecked in a broad ribbon of water over the steep precipice, burying itself in a vast chasm below, from out of which rose glittering many-hued clouds of spray.

Across this chasm on a barren rocky ridge, secure alike from the depredations of man and beast, lived a colony of wise old marabout storks. Standing on one scaly bony leg by the sides of their nests, they watched with interest, but unafraid, the movements of the two ebony figures who next morning came pushing their way through the dense foliage, and who in their turn gazed with like interest at these grotesque, bald-pated members of the feathered tribe who watched them so unblinkingly. Their eyes, however, soon lighted on a fresh and to them even more astonishing sight than the birds, for, deeply imbedded in the middle of a still pool, formed by the falling spray, swayed a tall bamboo pole, and firmly attached to it by a stout cord, two long narrow bundles floated and bobbed merrily about on the surface of the water.

What these bundles contained and how they came there was truly a mystery, for who would trouble to climb with them to such a wild inaccessible spot, was the question that puzzled Naju and Yidahonga as they sat on the edge of the pool watching the bundles straining at the cords in an effort to escape over the edge.

The first puzzle at least was easy of solution, so together they dived into the cool green depths

and side by side swam to the spot. One slash of the long hunting-knives, and then back again to the shore to satisfy their curiosity. Throwing the bundles down on the ground, they hacked at the covering, and layer after layer of tough woven matting burst apart, but the mysterious contents remained stubbornly hidden until the very last slash, when Naju with a gasp of horror stepped hastily back and, grasping Yidahonga by the arm, pulled him forcibly away.

Words failed them as they gazed at the result of their labours—for the hollow-eyed gaping skull of a skeleton leered back at them in diabolical derision. Nauseated with such an unexpected and revolting discovery, their only thought was to escape clear away from this tainted death pool, and they turned in haste only to find themselves confronting a creature who with outstretched arms barred the way.

They took it at first to be an animal, so wild and unkempt was this apparition, so covered with black matted hair the trunk and legs, and with only the eyes visible, deeply sunk in dark sockets between the tangled mane that covered the head and face. Stretching out a hand, with curving claw-like nails, he pointed behind them to the two grisly bundles left lying on the ground. From between his lips flowed a string of words, halting and hoarse, as if by reason of long disuse, whilst his eyes, mad with rage, glared from one to the other of the faces before him.

"Who are you," he growled, "who dares to invade this place and lay hands on the sacred dead

who are given into my keeping? Doomed now to wander for ever, exiled and alone, are the spirits of these two lepers whose bodies were brought and placed here that the clean water passing through their vile bones might purify the spirits before they too passed on to mingle with their brethren in the nether world! Me too, by your thrice cursed interference, have you doomed to death, for my trust is broken and now no longer will the great chief consider me worthy to guard the dead of our tribe! When what you have done comes to the ears of the people, in their rage they will forget the many weary years I have dwelt alone by this pool! I shall be taken captive, bound to a tree, and the women will hack me to pieces with their hoes!"

"Without doubt this creature is mad," was the thought in the minds of his hearers, as they listened to the wild words that fell from his lips. And small wonder, too, if, as he said, he had lived alone in this eerie spot for many years with only the dead for company.

Unbelievable as it seemed, yet there must be some truth in what they had just heard; not altogether could it be the ravings of a madman, or how else to account for the two bodies taken by them in all ignorance from the pool? Nor in their amazement could they think of anything to say to pacify this wild creature, but only stood watching him silently as the violence of his anger passed, and now, heedless of their presence, he knelt down by the side of his grisly charges and, crooning to himself in a low hoarse voice, sought to gather together

again the wrecked coverings. Without a glance to right or left he then rose and, taking one of the two bundles into his arms, staggered to the edge of the precipice and with all his might flung it far over. Still crooning dismally, back he came again for the other bundle, and that too shot like a live thing to join its fellow in the chasm below.

Fascinated by this weird creature, Naju with Yidahonga still stood watching and wondering what would be the end of these strange happenings, and the end when it came drove them to the edge of the precipice to gaze down into the dark depths beneath.

Standing with his back towards them, the keeper of the dead never ceased for one moment his melancholy crooning, and the dirge merged louder and louder until it ended with one last despairing shriek, when, flinging his arms out wide, he leapt high into the air and shot, a dark indistinct streak, to follow his charges down into the churning waters beneath. Relentlessly the sullen crashing roar rose up from the chasm, flooding their ears as they leant far out over the edge; but of no avail, for of what odds to the churning pounding waters beneath if a million such human atoms, driven mad by their own superstitions, chose to dash themselves to fragments on the rocks beneath!

Across on their jutting ledge the grim old marabout storks waited, calm-eyed and unquestioning, until such time as these remaining disturbers of their peace saw fit to leave them to their slumbers, for already the sun hung low on the horizon.

With a last hurried glance at the dank swirling

INTO THE WATERS

Facing p. 32.

pool, empty now of its grisly contents until such time as the bodies of yet other lepers should be brought and placed in its depth for purification, Naju with Yidahonga turned and left the sinister spot.

Wending their way up through tangled brushwood to where the rest of the company had been left, they even failed to notice the small sleek head of a leopard, watching them with lustrous yellow eyes over a clump of grass, until with a hoarse grunt it sprang—a long, lean, spotted bar—across in front of them, so engrossed were they turning over in their minds the strange things they had just witnessed.

Black belching smoke and turgid liquid mud, dank tangled forests and deep ravines, or bleak glittering snow-peaks—all these in their turn beckoned to the serious-eyed Prince searching for adventure. To him it seemed that of them all the latter held forth the greatest promise, so down to the seas of crusted lava and across to the snow-clad volcanoes he went with his following.

Nor did they lose heart or utter one word of complaint, these big, brave-hearted slaves, when the jagged lava cruelly cut their naked feet and chopped the ends off unprotected toes. To their suffering the mid-day sun added also his quota, beating fiercely down on the iron-like surface that scorched and blistered as well as burnt them.

Nevertheless slowly but undaunted on they went, and the more tired they were the more heartily they joined in the refrain when the young Swahili away at the head of the column trolled out in his deep musical voice the folk-songs of their tribe.

On and away through village after village where dusky, pot-bellied, wide-eyed piccanins peered out at them from beneath the palm stems, and the people themselves hurried from their dwellings to proffer pinches of snuff and clusters of yellow bananas to the host of strangers.

From the men who guided them along the smoothest paths they heard that each and all of the volcanic giants around were known by a name of their own; that the one who belched forth smoke and mud was Namlagira, the Mountain with the Belly of Fire; that down in the bowels of the greatest of the forest-clad giants, huge herds of cattle, it was believed, roamed at will, and the low hoarse mutterings that rumbled forth were the lowing of this vast multitude of livestock that would one day overflow and enrich the people at its foot. To hasten this end and propitiate the spirit of the mountain, heifers with their first calves were daily driven from the surrounding herds and the milk drawn forth by the high priests of the mountain and made to flow as a sacrifice down the sides of the volcano.

The two snow-capped peaks now rapidly drawing nearer they learnt to know as Karisimbi, the God that Sleeps, and Mikeno, the Mountain of Poverty.

Then at last a day dawned when, with a flood of thankfulness to be clear once and for all of the jagged lava, they stood on soft yielding soil at the very foot of this Hill of Poverty.

Rolling up the narrow track to meet them at the head of a stream of people, beating drums and blowing ear-splitting blasts on long ivory horns,

came the very fattest human being they had ever beheld.

How it came about that their arrival was proclaimed in this manner was more than Naju could tell. However there was no resisting the hearty goodwill that beamed from the merry, twinkling eyes set in that fat, laughing face, with its pendulous chins, so he shook the huge limp paw held out to him so hopefully.

It seemed that he was also expected to shake hands with each of the headmen, and the women and children as well, so hemmed about was he by a sea of outstretched hands.

At last however the greetings were over, and they headed for the village seen now for the first time, hidden at the foot of the mountain. Once there, here again was proof positive that their arrival had been expected and prepared for in the shape of three wide round huts, newly built and fragrant still with freshly cut grass and newly turned soil.

But the explanation was after all a very simple one, for, said the fat man, "How should a Prince of the great Mutuzi pass through my domain without word of it being brought to me, Choma, who am the chief of this vast Watabwa tribe? From the very first moment you set foot in the village over the border news of your coming started on its way to me. When the chief of the first village heard the message he at once sent on a runner to the next, and so on through all the villages until it came to me at last. Very little, let me tell you, can happen in my country, word of

which is not brought to me either by runner or beaten out on the drums."

To his royal young guest the big, benign, beaming Choma was a revelation, for the troubles and cares of his chieftainship pressed very lightly on this man.

His many subjects looked upon him as a father and a friend rather than their ruler, and instead of betaking themselves off as far out of his reach as possible, came and built their dwellings in every available spot around his kraal, and there waxed fat and prosperous on the rich generous soil at the foot of the Hill of Poverty.

To these people the coming of Naju and his large following of slaves spelt a welcome break in the care-free but nevertheless often dull monotony of their existence, and they vied with each other and fought noisy battles between themselves as to who could show the greatest kindness to the strangers.

Four laughing women, the youngest and prettiest of Choma's sixty wives, were nothing loth when ordered to attend strictly to the wants of this handsome-eyed Prince and his brawny, muscular companion, whilst the village women gladly provided and cooked the grain, and having carried it to the stalwart bearers, stayed to bandy merry jokes with them, that is, until jealous husbands hove on the scene.

From the surrounding villages came yet other chiefs to offer their greetings to so rare a visitor. Day after day away across the lava plains and up through the swaying mealie stems of the plantations they marched at the head of strings of slaves laden

with gifts that the village storehouses were ransacked to provide—pots of wild honey that had lain sealed for many years, still fragrant with the perfume of sweet herbs and scented blossoms; heavy twists of mellow brown tobacco and the pick of the flocks and herds, the straightest-backed calves, the fattest-tailed sheep!

One day from amongst a crowd of other gifts the bright, inquisitive eyes of a tiny monkey peeped and peered between the bars of its bamboo cage, restlessly awaiting its release, when with one bound it lighted airily like a ball of thistledown on to a near-by roof. With two clear brown eyes set in a round black face and a coat of white, silky hair it calmly surveyed its new surroundings.

To think was to act with this airy fairy atom, and only man, with the aid of his deadly weapons and his everlasting lust to slay, could have captured a creature of such quick intelligence, such lightning-like movements.

"It was in the depths of the forest on the banks of a stream that I first saw her," said the maker of the gift, a tall ebony warrior, proud of the interest shown in his capture, "when one day the whole troop came down to the water's edge to drink and bathe. Carefully hidden between the roots of a giant tree, I watched and waited, and at last with a well-placed arrow brought down the nearest, which turned out to be a female. On her back, unharmed, and clinging with its soft little fingers to the long hair was this tiny mite, then only a few days old. Although in the forests the monkey folk abound in their thousands, of every conceivable

shape and colour, never before has a white one been seen or even heard of, so what else could we name her but Weupi, meaning 'White as milk.'"

In the village bins and storehouses the grain lay safely stored, for the crops had long ago been harvested and the hoes laid aside to await the beginning of another seed time, when they must be resharpened and the soil turned for the new seed.

In the hot dry months between, the land lies idle, baked dry and cracked by the fiery rays of a scorching sun, when not a blade of grass will grow or a single cloud drifts across the sky to break the blazing expanse of blue.

Of such were the long days idled away so pleasantly in Choma's prosperous village. Men sat or lay about in every shady nook, and the women stayed quietly in the huts until such time as the sun hung low on the horizon and the hour had arrived to cook the evening meal. Then the principal men of the village would foregather and partake of the evening meal together, and afterwards, as is ever their custom when the pipes were well alight, tell stirring tales of their most thrilling adventures. A much-loved subject, which never palled, was the story of the big black apes that live at the top of Mikeno. Very few of the inhabitants had ever really seen one, for apart from their cunning and ferocity there were many superstitions regarding them. It was for instance said that if a man should even assist in the capturing or killing of one of these beasts, his daughters would never have children and his sons die before they attained manhood. Being a very old superstition and

thoroughly believed, it served to keep the beasts unmolested. Occasionally however the apes themselves, in their search for a certain delicacy, would come some distance down the hill, and then their lion-like roars and the noise, made by clopping their chests with doubled fists when challenging each other to fight, could be heard for many miles. During that time not a soul would stir out of the village, the women especially realising the danger to themselves, and refusing even to fetch fresh food from the gardens.

Thus it was that Naju first heard of these wonderful gorillas, and a longing to come face to face with the great beasts themselves took possession of his soul. The thought of a hand-to-hand combat with one of the creatures prevented him from sleeping one night. So, seated with Yidahonga in the hut, together they tried to think of a plan to reach the spot where lived these strange beasts. The problem first was how, without a guide, to find a way through the dense tropical forests which clothed the mountain-sides, for they now knew it would be useless to ask Choma for a man from the village. However fortune ever favours the brave, and the very next day there happened an incident that not only procured for them the necessary guide but drove the whole population wild for revenge, when even life-long superstitions were forgotten or disregarded altogether.

Made lazy and drowsy by the fierce heat, the whole village were indulging in a prolonged siesta when loud shouts were heard in the distance;

these, drawing nearer and nearer, brought men, women and children out with a rush to see a stretcher, roughly made of green bamboo, carried in and set down in front of Choma's hut. Out of it crawled a terrible object, so smothered with clotted blood and caked mud that even the parents at first failed to recognise it as their own son. His father and mother, each taking an arm, then led him, still gibbering with fear, into their hut.

CHAPTER III

The Great Black Apes

For many days they tended him carefully as he hovered on the borders of the Great Divide, his body crushed and broken and the tender flesh deeply pierced by giant fingers.

The only animals in the world possessed of fingers of such size and strength as to have caused these terrible wounds were the great black apes themselves. No wonder then that the time was eagerly awaited when the youth, sufficiently recovered, would be able to tell for himself the story of his terrible adventure.

When that day arrived, willing hands lifted the woven mat on which he lay and set him down on the warm ground in the hot golden sunshine.

On either side of the prostrate figure knelt Naju with Choma and Yidahonga, whilst the rest of the people crowded around, straining their ears to catch every word uttered by the weak, faltering voice.

As the pitiful tale proceeded loud exclamations of anger and threats of revenge broke from the lips of the men, and the tears rolled unchecked down the cheeks of the women.

"In the forenoon of that fatal day," the youth

began, "I set off with Muki, the son of Taveta, to search for wild honey, taking with me a firestick to smoke out the bees and an axe with which to cut out the nest.

"Up through the gardens and away along a narrow track leading to the nearest foothills we went, until the frantic twittering of a honey-bird called our attention, whereupon we left the track and plunged into the thick undergrowth at the side.

"With answering whistles, we followed the little feathery guide as he flew from branch to branch, bringing us at last to an old Mopani tree, from a hole in the trunk of which the bees came and went.

"Climbing up to the nest, Muki was very soon busy handing down heavy chunks of comb laden with honey. Cutting a wide strip of bark from the same tree and laying it down at its foot, I piled the honey in the centre, when suddenly the sound of heavy shuffling footsteps on the dry leaves fell on my ear. I turned sharply round, and there, not ten paces away, leering evilly as he ambled quickly towards me, came an old black man-ape!

"Too paralysed by fear to move or utter a sound, I could only wait helplessly as the beast came nearer and nearer, and at last, when quite close, caught me in its grip.

"Pressing ever tighter and tighter, like bands of iron, the massive arms closed around me until the bones of my body cracked and burst as would an eggshell beneath the feet of an elephant.

"Smothered by the coarse black hair pressed into my eyes and mouth and the reek of the fœtid breath, I tried to shriek aloud, and struggled with

all my strength to escape, but the monster only held me closer and chuckled with evil glee.

"Knowing that the nearest village lay far away and no one was likely to pass by so wild a spot, of what use for me to hope for help? All remembrance of Muki still up the tree had been driven from my head until with a thud he landed on the ground a few paces away.

"Tightly grasped in his hand was the small axe with which he had cut out the bees' nest, and to my amazement, without a moment's hesitation, straight he came towards the ape; then raising his arm, he dealt it a blow that laid the hideous face open from mouth to ear.

"Out over my face gushed the warm blood, and then I felt myself plucked up with a huge paw and flung away amongst the trees. Maddened by pain and rage, he then swung round and clutched Muki as he turned to run away.

"Many a moon will come and go ere the terrible scene that followed will pass from my memory, for this time, to my shame, no faithful comrade stepped in to distract the brute's attention. Try how I would, my miserable broken body refused to obey when I sought to rise and go to his rescue, and I could only lie helpless on the grass whilst shriek upon shriek rang in my ears.

"The end of it all I know not, for the gods were merciful and shrouded my soul in darkness.

"When next I awoke it was to find myself being carried along on a stretcher by strangers."

As the youth finished his story and lay back exhausted the people on the edge of the crowd

pushed and jostled each other, and loud cries of "Make way for Taveta" arose.

Out from amongst their midst stepped a man, his face grey and drawn with lines of sorrow, but whose eyes smouldered and glowed fiercely with anger. Glancing neither to right or left, he passed on to where Choma still stood.

"Pardon, O Chief," he began, "if my words sound rough to your ears, but you see before you a man torn and rent with a great grief, for I am Taveta the father of the lad Muki. On that day when he failed to appear at the evening meal, I paid no heed, thinking perchance he had gone to another village on a visit to some of his many comrades.

"This I now know was not the case, but that instead, somewhere at the foot of the Hill of Poverty, alone and unguarded, his body lies crushed and broken, easy food for the slinking hyænas and other carrion of the wild, whilst his spirit has been driven thus soon to mingle with those of his ancestors in the other world.

"Give me men, O Choma, that I may go and search for his body, for did he not die the death of a hero, and is it not meet that his bones should rest amongst those of our bravest warriors?

"He was my only son, and I call upon the gods to witness that from this time forth I declare vengeance on the great black apes! No further heed will I pay to the dictates of superstition, but on every occasion that arises will I hunt, capture or kill the evil beasts and I will be the one to strike the first blow! Not many moons ago three others

of my kinsmen were also slain by one of these same apes. Early one morning word was brought into their village that a robber in the plantations was stealing the bananas. Taking it to be only a man, and cautioned by their chief not to slay him, only to drive him out, they armed themselves with stout staves and set off to the spot.

"In these circumstances, judge of their horror when, instead of a man, boldly out from between the palms to meet them stepped an old black ape! Without giving them time to turn and dash back to the village for their spears, he was upon them. Doggedly they fought and struck at him with all their might, but one by one with crashing blows of his huge fists he crushed their skulls, and then tore them limb from limb. When too late their brethren arrived to the rescue, and not until then did he escape into the forest."

"Here at last is the very man I need to help me reach the gorillas' stronghold," was the thought that passed through Naju's mind, as he listened to Taveta's threats of revenge. "Once we are up through the trackless forests lining the sides of the mountain, then, if necessary, the actual finding of these beasts can be safely left to the trackers Amani and Amisi."

Waiting patiently until the body of Muki had been carried in and buried, he sought out Choma and bade him at once call a meeting of the village men in the council hall. Filled with wonder, the men flocked in at the open doors and, squatting in rows on the mudded floor, listened silently as the

tall stranger Prince told them of his wish to see and slay one of their lifelong enemies.

"Is there a man amongst you," he challenged, "brave enough to defy the ancient superstitions of your tribe that have up to now served to keep these apes so sacred? If there is such an one and he is willing to come with me to act as my guide, let him hold aloft his spear."

Only a few days ago, and no bribe in the world would have tempted the bravest warrior in that assembly even to think of so daring a scheme; but the calm confidence, the fearless bearing of this youth shed a new light on the matter. He should be shown that they could be equally brave, so to a man they sprang to their feet and in an instant the hall was filled with waving spears. But out from amongst their midst stepped Taveta, his eyes shining with triumph.

"I claim as mine the right to guide Prince Naju up the mountain-side," he shouted.

But the surprises of the day were not yet over, for no sooner had Taveta finished speaking than the chief Choma stepped forward.

"I too go with this brave Prince," he said "and as we leave at early dawn to-morrow, bid the womenfolk prepare the foodstuffs to be taken with us."

Pulling themselves up by the branches, hacking a way with their knives through the rope-like clinging creepers, falling over rotting roots and sliding backwards on the greasy ground, for two whole days Taveta led his party up through the

dank, chill, trackless forests. With hands torn and bleeding, and bare feet cut about and bruised, they emerged at last from between the ancient tree-trunks.

"The gods be praised; here at least the sun can reach and warm our chilled bodies," panted Choma, as they stepped out on to a wide sunlit patch.

"If these puny human beings will aspire to climb my sacred sides, they shall at least pay a fitting price," laughed the Hill of Poverty; so instead of a carpet of lush green grass, as might have been expected, in front of the intrepid climbers, swayed by every passing breeze, grew a forest of giant stinging-nettles. Nothing daunted however and sending two men on ahead to cut a way through with their long hunting-knives, on they went again. Bringing up the rear, carefully picking their way with the vicious plants reaching well over their heads, came the pygmies Amani and Amisi, their little red-brown bodies covered with white nettlerash.

Early morning, on the fourth day after leaving the village, saw them standing at the foot of a steep jutting ledge, whilst away above them, cold, clear and gleaming, the snow-crowned peak of Mikeno tapered into the blue.

"Before we climb over this ledge, let me caution you not to utter a word or make a sound," said Taveta, "for we are now very near to the spot where the great apes live."

With every sense on the alert, step by step they picked their way up the sides, often standing still

to listen with bated breath as a loose stone went crashing and bumping down below. Crouching low, at last they topped the ridge, to find themselves standing on the edge of a wide-open plateau. Beneath their feet now grew a carpet of soft thick grass, whilst all around, their tall feathery fronds clearly outlined against the blue sky, were clumps of stately bamboos. Tightly grasping their weapons, ears straining to catch the slightest sound, eyes striving to pierce the patches of deep shadow, they waited for a space to make certain that no inquisitive black eyes had duly noted their arrival. But only the startled twittering of the birds and the soughing of the wind through the yellow bamboo stems broke the stillness of this lofty world beneath the snow-line.

"Now before we commence our search, tell the bearers carrying the foodstuffs to wait here," said Taveta to Naju. "Next cast aside the garments likely to hamper your movements and follow me, for very rarely do the apes move far away from this spot. Without doubt we shall come upon them somewhere close by hunting for food."

Moving slowly along in single file, pausing here and there whilst the trackers circled around, searching the ground for a sign, across sunlit glades and gloomy shadow they went. All unheeded, the sun climbed up and hung a fiery ball over their heads, and still Taveta, with never a doubt in his mind as to the ultimate success of the venture, led them on.

And not in vain did they stick doggedly to the self-imposed task, for at last they were rewarded—

the clean fresh traces of a troop of the beasts they had journeyed so far to seek. Beckoning to the two pygmies, Naju in a low voice bade them take up the spoor and follow it. With heads bent low, keen eyes noting each broken leaf or twisted blade of grass, like hounds on the scent, the lithe brown figures pattered along.

Then at last it happened, and they froze in their tracks with such suddenness that the others all but ran into and fell over them, even before the clear warning whistle told that the quarry had now been sighted. Without a word every man dropped down, and lying flat on the ground, peered out to where a splendid old male gorilla stood at the foot of a clump of bamboos. From between the blades of grass with eager eyes they watched him, as all unsuspicious he groped about between the stems, and grasping the young tender shoots, tore them up and noisily crunched the succulent pith. The sharp snapping of twigs and deep hoarse mutterings told that he was not, as they at first thought, by any means alone, and that the rest of the troop were somewhere close by.

Signing to the others not to move or utter a sound, Naju rose softly to his feet. Armed with a long gleaming spear and a solid ivory-headed club, he stepped noiselessly up and stood close at the back of the unsuspecting animal. Perhaps some slight rustle of the grass smote on his ears, or it may be that that wonderful sixth sense of his, dormant until this moment, at last awoke, warning him that he was no longer alone. Whatever the reason that drove him to do so, the great ape turned

slowly and deliberately round and faced his opponent. Expecting to see either a member of his family or at least only another of his own kind, he stood frozen with astonishment, to find instead one of the hated human beings defiantly opposing him in his own stronghold!

For the space of a moment he remained thus, the skin of his forehead wrinkling with fury. Next, doubling two horny fists, with a deafening drawn-out roar he beat a loud thumping challenge on his chest. With one idea only in his mind, to crush the life out of this, to him, puny adversary, gibbering with rage, the immense arms upraised, he rushed to the charge. But into the shaggy chest, straight for the heart, hurtled a heavy spear.

Squealing with pain, the clumsy form lurched forward and all but fell; but fury lending him fresh strength, on he came again. The victory of this first blow lay with the higher cunning of the human brain, but whether it would triumph in the end over the sheer brute force and animal strength pitted against it remained to be seen!

The onlookers in the grass held their breath, for so near to the slim form of its adversary loomed the black shaggy ape.

No doubt however of the issue entered Naju's head as he watched the brute stagger from the spear thrust, then recover himself for another attack. Backing away step by step, he deftly avoided the onslaught, then, swinging the ivory club, he brought it with crashing force into the hideous face. For another moment the upraised arms aimlessly thrashed the air, until he toppled

sideways, fell, and rolled over and over on the ground. Once again, for the last time, Naju drove the blood-stained spear through the quivering body. After that the ape lay quiet on his back, the blood gushing out of the deep wounds, the great slimy tongue bitten partly through in his agony and the mighty muscles twitching in death.

Up from their hiding-place sprang Yidahonga and the rest of the following. Eager to look at the semi-human monster, they rushed to where it lay and, jabbering at the top of their voices with excitement, turned the heavy carcase over.

"He is indeed an ancient warrior this," said Choma, "for his fangs are worn and yellow with age, and by this wide grey patch of hair across his back he must be nigh a hundred and fifty years old. See also this high crest of bone running across from ear to ear, some say to guard the skull from splitting when the males fight and whack each other with heavy branches. Judging too from the many scars across the skull of this old grandfather, he has emerged the victor in many a well-fought battle, when the younger bloods have endeavoured to usurp his place as leader of the troop. That reminds me, where, by the way, are the rest of the troop, and why are they lying low, for they were certainly feeding close by when we came on the scene?" Until Choma reminded them afresh all thought of further danger had passed from the minds of his hearers, so occupied were they in listening to his words.

Sharp on the instant came the answer to this question! Pandemonium, as of a thousand devils let loose, broke out. Every tree and shrub awoke to life, and out between the branches black malignant faces lit by fierce evil eyes glared at the intruders, and on every side deep booming roars ending in shrill shrieks smote the ear.

Whilst the females and their young crouched hidden in the shade, boldly out to do battle for their clan came other males of the troop. Four immense sable black forms, led by an ancient shaggy warrior, beating on his chest the challenge of his kind, ambled straight for the little band. Even when a well-aimed spear sailed through the air and struck their leader in the throat, sending him coughing to the ground, the rest of the apes never wavered, but further maddened by the sickly smell of the blood spattered on the grass, on they came over his prostrate body.

Confused with the clamour, the men with Naju fidgeted about, some to advance and meet their attackers, others to turn and run away; but with a few words spoken in the serene, unmoved tones of a leader of men he calmed their fears.

"Stand your ground," he said, "and as one false move spells death to all of us, make ready your weapons, choose your adversary beforehand, and strike only to kill!"

The sound of teeth harshly gritted together, laboured breathing, snarls of anger and hoarse groans of pain mingled with the smashing blows dealt by the heavy clubs, as man and beast fought

THE ATTACK BY GORILLAS.

Facing p. 52

and struggled, each intent to tear the life from the other. On the ground two of the apes soon lay dying with half-closed eyes in a rapidly widening pool of blood. In the still heaving chest of one of them Naju's spear stuck fast between its ribs, whilst the immense head of yet another sagged limply back, the short thick throat severed by a thrust from Yidahonga's hunting-knife.

Only a few paces away another battle raged fiercely. Flat on the ground, heedless of the struggle around him, lay the chief Choma; for, hampered by his weighty, ponderous body, he had failed to move clear of a crashing blow aimed at him by a furious ape, and lay there stunned. But the slight, slim body of Taveta, fighting side by side with his chief, is in better case. Some time previously the spear had been wrenched from his hand by a wily adversary and flung far out of reach, but nevertheless armed only with a broad narrow-pointed lance, he fights on undaunted and so far scatheless.

Man and his counterpart the ape. Round and round each other they circle, while ever and anon from between the lips of the former issue snatches of a tribal war song. Not a sound makes the ape, too intent is he in trying to catch and crush this smooth-skinned, nimble tormentor of his, who time and again darts in and adds another wound to the many he already bears. But the end must soon come now, for already the ape, weakened by the streams of blood gushing from the gaping cuts, staggers, lurches, and finally topples over. Taking the spear silently held out to him by Naju, Taveta

with the picture ever before him of the broken body of his son, plunges it savagely through the heart of his victim.

Of poorer stuff than his three ill-fated brothers is the gorilla chosen by Amani and Amisi as their especial adversary. So confident are they of being able to deliver the fatal thrust in their own good time, that, like ants around a goliath beetle, they skip and hop, with here a prick and there a blow. Time and again the ape charges clumsily towards one of them, only to be prodded in the back by the other, then, on swinging quickly around again, finds that both of them are well away out of his reach. Finding his every attempt thwarted, his first mood of furious anger gives way to a sullen desire to escape, and lo and behold, before either of the pygmies are aware of his intention, he is ambling quickly away between the bamboos. Straight he goes for a deep ravine, the dense forest at the bottom of which he knows of old to be a secure hiding-place. For a second his tormentors stand dumbfounded, with eyes wide and mouths agape they watch him go, the little short legs urging the unwieldy body over the ground at an astonishing pace.

There is no time to think, but something will have to be done, and that mighty soon, for another instant and he will be over the edge and safely out of reach of their spears. Shoulder to shoulder they dart away, skimming bird-like over the ground, then together they leap on to the broad back and with all their puny strength strive to pull him down. But it is too late; already he dangles one

foot over the edge, and they only succeed in hurling him farther forward.

They too are carried away, but cling grimly to the coarse black hair as he rolls and bounds down the incline, but the very sticks and stones lying about range themselves on his side, knocking the breath out of his enemies until at last, scratched and partly stunned, they fall away. Arrived at the bottom, his rubber-like body none the worse, the ape scrambles to his feet, shakes himself like a big dog, and is quickly lost to sight amongst the thick foliage.

Away back upon the plateau, in the cool shade of an old tree, Naju and the rest of the victorious band are seated, when over the ridge climb a saddened pair of pygmies. That their bodies are cut and bruised, smeared with soil and twigs, is as nothing to their shame at such an ignominious defeat. Seating themselves on the ground, with a glance neither to right or left, they pretentiously search the broad hide belts around their waist for the much-treasured pipes, but alas, even these valued friends have basely deserted them in their hour of need, having fallen out and been lost, so they are left without even this small comfort.

By far too generous-hearted is their young Prince to torment such a pair of beaten creatures, but the glint of quiet amusement lurks in the big, serious eyes as he glances across at Yidahonga, clearly showing that he is quite well aware of what has befallen them.

A careful search of the surrounding bushes proved that the rest of the troop of gorillas had

taken themselves off down the far side of the mountain; so with no fear of a second surprise attack, the spears and clubs are laid aside, and weary bodies relax in a well-earned rest.

Seated back to back, one supporting the other, the pygmies forget their troubles in blissful slumber, and old Choma, hands limply folded on his fat paunch, his face deeply sunk in its cushion of folded chins, awakes the echoes, and even himself, with many a rattling snore.

And then to break this spell of slumber from somewhere close at hand came a dismal cry! Instantly the sleepers are wide awake, and snatching up the discarded weapons, they spring to their feet and with beating hearts stand waiting. Wondering from which direction this new attack threatens, anxious eyes peer into every patch of shade, ears strain to catch the slightest sound, but not a thing moves.

At last a doubt creeps into their minds, "had they really heard the call or only imagined it?" Mystified, they turn away. Then again, and this time clear for all to hear, comes the murmuring cry again. This time there is no mistake, and although the sound is in no way like the dull booming roars of the gorillas, still the cunning of these wily beasts had already been tested once that day, and no further risks must be taken.

Keeping close together, spears held ready, they make for the nearest clump of bamboos, and having first surrounded it, roughly rattle the stems together. Fully expecting the beast, whatever it might be, to now come out with a rush, they spring hastily

back, ready to strike. But the mystery deepens, for still nothing appears; only from the heart of the clump comes the call again.

Becoming impatient, Naju decides once and for all to end the suspense, so roughly pulling apart the branches, he peers between them and there sees, tightly wedged between the canes—just where his mother had first hidden and then deserted him—a young gorilla. His round black eyes, filled with a world of sadness, gaze pleadingly up into the face above him, and sees only sympathy and a pity for his loneliness written there. Happy to know he is no longer alone, quick with the certain instinct of the wild to judge friend from foe, with flattened ears and ugly black face puckered into a thousand wrinkles, he chuckles deeply.

A smile of amusement flickers across Naju's face as he remembers the rough awakening of his companions, the pangs of fear, and even now the waiting spears, all caused by this harmless little creature calling for his mother. Forcing a way in between the gleaming golden-brown canes, with both hands he grasps the hairy shoulders, and raising the squat, heavy body, lifts it out of the gloomy hiding-place into the bright sunlight.

Down on to the ground five spears rattle loudly, for of all things in heaven or earth their owners least expected to see it was this little sable-black ape. With clicking tongues and many a loud "Ya-ba," they cluster eagerly around him as, feet and hands firmly planted on the ground, he gazes wonderingly from one to the other. Nor does he show the slightest fear at the sight of so many strange

faces and only backs a step away when the young Swahili stretches out a hand to grasp him. All the same, he is unwilling to be captured or handled in any way, and dodges and ducks skilfully when pursued by the determined Yidahonga. It soon began to dawn on the onlookers that this was a game he knew well how to play, and by his deep chuckles thoroughly enjoyed.

Then there was Choma who, being tickled by the ridiculous antics of the pair, threw back his head, roaring with laughter. This was taken by the little ape as yet another sign of good-fellowship, so slyly sidling up to the fat chief with his powerful young arms he gripped him tightly around the knees. Taken as he was completely by surprise, Choma's round fat body wobbled and finally fell sprawling. Really startled this time by the unexpected result of his little trick and the shouts of laughter it drew forth, the ape hesitated a moment, then turned, and with one spring landed pick-a-back on the man nearest to him, which at that moment happened to be Yidahonga. From this high eminence he leered mischievously around, revealing a wide mouthful of little white pointed milk-teeth. Fearing that he might suddenly take it into his queer little head to run away, and being unwilling to lose such a rare and jolly little creature, they cut a strip of bark, and pulling out the strong inner lining, fastened it around his neck; but his disgust at this uncalled-for indignity was very great, and to show his resentment he first rolled on the ground, tugged at the cord to loosen it, and then calmly pulled it off over his head. Then,

with another spring, he again took refuge on Yidahonga's broad shoulders, and from there nothing would dislodge him.

Of the main troop of gorillas, not another sight or sound had been heard, and there only now remained to find the way back to where the rest of the party had been left. But first Naju ordered the two pygmies Amani and Amisi to stay behind and remove the skins and skulls of two of the gorillas.

"Be careful to pick out the very best of the three," he said, "and see to it that you skin them carefully, for I wish to send them as a gift to my father, Dungundega."

Hungry and thirsty, but glowing with triumph at the victorious ending to that never-to-be-forgotten day, the weary band of men made their way back to where the rest of the party had been left. Whilst still some distance away, the flickering glimmer of a fire appeared to cheer them on, and a delicious smell of browning meat drifted to their nostrils. For the men left to take care of the foodstuffs had also enjoyed a little adventure of their own. For whilst sitting drowsily beneath the trees, there came feeding towards them a fat red forest hog, and when only a few paces away, her keen snout detected an aromatic root; unfortunately for herself she stopped to eat it, and now, stuck between forked sticks over a heap of bright red embers, thick succulent chunks of good meat sizzled and crackled merrily.

Squatting down around the fire, heedless of scorched fingers, the famished men snatched up the

partly cooked meat, and having hastily sprinkled it with coarse salt, gnawed it with their strong white teeth. When only a few blackened scraps of skin and bone lay scattered around—all that remained of the feast—they moved away from the fire, and laying themselves down on the ground, slept and snored, until awakened by the pygmies bringing in the heavy pelts and skulls. Picking up one of the latter from where it lay on the ground, Naju called to Taveta. "Look," he said, "for here is the answer to your plea, when on hearing of the death of your little son, you called upon the gods to aid you in your plan of revenge against the black apes, for see, deeply embedded in the jawbone of this skull is the broken point of a small axe."

As a fitting end to so memorable a day, they spent yet another night on that high silent ridge, for already dark clouds drifted across the heavens, and only the tops of the highest peaks, lit by the last rays of a fast setting sun, showed dimly against a sombre sky, whilst the valleys beneath lay wrapt in purple shadows. Squatting around a glowing log fire, they gazed with wondering eyes down to where the frowning shapes of the mighty volcanoes stood, clearly revealed by the red glow from the fiery heart of Namlagira, the one active monster who from time to time gave forth a loud defiant rumble. "Be warned," it seemed to say, "for, unlike my neighbours, I at least am very much alive and shall in the not far distant future vomit forth streams of molten lava that will bury the surrounding country, decimate the villages, wipe out all the animal or vegetable life, either great or

small, and even the fish in the lakes and rivers by causing their waters to boil with my great heat."

"For," said old Choma, "once every twenty years does the Mountain with the Belly of Fire plunge the country into desolation. Then again will the teeming population of the now fertile valleys around its foot be obliged to flee to the very tips of the highest mountains, there to die of starvation and exposure or be eaten by the dread carnivora, for all this has happened once during my life, and the end of the cycle of twenty years is again fast drawing near."

Weary with the exciting events of the day, their tired bodies soothed by the warm glow from the fire, that little band of men lay down on the piles of soft leaves spread ready for them. Gorillas, volcanoes and revenge all alike forgotten, one by one they sank into a deep dreamless sleep, and only the sound of the falling logs as the watchmen built up the fires afresh broke the stillness until the early dawn. Then, awakened by the noisy twittering of the birds, they sat up to gaze sleepily around, and the very first thing their eyes lighted on was the still sleeping form of the young Swahili, Yidahonga, and curled up in the middle of his back, also sound asleep, the little black hairy ape.

CHAPTER IV

The Man-eaters of Seramanis

The late afternoon of the second day saw the little band of men again drawing near to the outskirts of Choma's village; but a careful look-out had been kept for their return, and long before they arrived a tumultuous crowd thronged out to meet them, blowing ivory horns, beating wooden drums, and accompanied by the tinkling jingle of the little curved metal bells worn by the men on all festive occasions. Even when still some distance away they shouted merry greetings to the returned warriors.

Piga, as the little ape had already been named, stared fearlessly back at them, his small, black, ugly face twitching with excitement as presently they crowded around him. Even when the news that four of their hated enemies had been slain drew forth deafening cheers, he only grinned his appreciation of the din, and when finally set down in the village and surrounded, at a safe distance be it said, by an interested crowd, he strutted proudly around as vain as a peacock, and when some of the women turned and went into a nearby hut he too stalked calmly after them. Being afraid to push him out of the door again and not knowing

what else to do, they took down a big, heavy bunch of ripe bananas and offered him one. This he politely took, then with his other hand greedily snatched the rest of the bunch and ambled out again. Here again the sight of the little white monkey Weupi perched on the top of the doorway so astonished him that he then and there sat straight down on his haunches to take a thorough good look at that dainty little person. Just as full of curiosity as he, she at once climbed down, and so for some seconds they stood gazing seriously into each other's eyes, then, apparently satisfied with what they found there, the two of them settled happily down to share the stolen bananas.

Really delighted at the bottom of his heart to be safely back in his comfortable village and at the same time find himself the admired hero of his many wives, Choma ordered that no further work should be done that day. The whole village had already been swept spotlessly clean from end to end by little piccanins with palm leaves, and in anticipation of their chief's return the old grandmothers had brewed many pots of strong beer, and judging by the fruity smell they exhaled and the sly knowing twinkle in their bleary old eyes, had also liberally sampled the brew.

Two of the fattest-tailed sheep had been slaughtered to provide a feast for Choma and his guests, and in every dwelling lay piled a heap of sweet potatoes and fresh green vegetables brought by the women from the gardens and laid side by side with little bundles of dry firewood wherewith to cook the evening meal.

The massive pelts of the gorillas were minutely examined, and a long string of people went with Taveta to the grave of his dead son, there to sling from the top of a long pole, as a memorial to the little hero, the gorilla skull with the axe still embedded in it.

Every single detail of the now famous battle had to be told over and over again, and when they heard of Naju's single-handed combat, the men cheered lustily. Not only was Naju deafened by the cheering, but embarrassed too by the many soft glances from the eyes of the women; so, to change the subject, he held his hand aloft to quiet them and then told them, amidst roars of laughter, of Choma's undignified tumble.

Piga and Weupi were soon inseparable friends. Weupi, clinging to the long hair, snuggled cosily on her big friend's round tummy, whilst he strutted proudly around.

The day following their return was indeed a merry one, and not altogether devoid of excitement either, for Piga, grossly overfed and finding time hang heavily on his hands, turned his attention to the bantam-like chickens busily scratching around the huts. He very soon discovered that the only way to catch these wiry, sporting little fowls was to gallop round and round after them until they dropped with fatigue.

Having at last succeeded in catching a chicken, he became interested to know how it would behave under water. No sooner was this thought of than it was done! Clutching it tightly by the head and tail, off to the nearest pool he went, and holding

the unfortunate bird under the water, calmly let it struggle and die.

This, to his mind, was a really enjoyable way of passing the time, so off he started after another fowl, and soon had gathered together a heap of twenty bedraggled bodies before he was finally discovered by the wrathful owners and led away to his masters for chastisement.

Nonplussed for the moment by anything so unheard-of, Naju could not at first think of a punishment fitting so grave an offence, but at last hit upon a plan that once and for all cured the young ape of even glancing towards anything wearing feathers again.

"Go," he said to one of his slaves, "and get me a strong raffia sack, of the kind in which the rice is kept, while *you*," he ordered another slave, "go and catch the very biggest rooster you can find and bring it here to me."

Together with the rooster into the sack went Piga, and then the top was securely fastened. Next, taking a strong, slim withy from a nearby roof, Naju administered a thorough beating to Piga through the sack.

During the strokes the rooster squawked loudly as a few strokes fell inadvertently upon him, but not a sound uttered Piga. When the sack was untied he came wearily out; but so convinced was he that the rooster was at the root of all the trouble that the mere sight of that innocent bird, smoothing his ruffled plumage and recovering his lost dignity, drove him pell-mell into the nearest hut, and his careful efforts for the rest of the day

to avoid meeting or passing a fowl caused a lot of merriment.

The very next morning it was the sight of some tiny yellow pups, just beginning to stagger about the world on their little helpless legs, that aroused his young affections. But how to show his love for them, that was the question! There was only one thing that he could do—he must pick them up and nurse them; so with one securely tucked under his arm he climbed up a tree and sat down on one of the branches. After all, how was he to know that it couldn't cling to his long hair as Weupi did, and that as soon as he let go the stupid thing would fall to the ground and so be killed?

However there were several others left that he could still nurse, so down he went again. Alas for the unfortunate owner, that whole litter of seven future hunting dogs met the same sad fate before something else turned up to amuse this ever restless creature.

Deeply bitten with the "fever of the horizon" and blessed with a nature craving for excitement, this first thrilling encounter with the beasts of the forest only served to add fresh fuel to the flames of Naju's longing to be up and away again, in search of yet other new and undiscovered worlds.

"Warn the bearers," he said to Yidahonga, "to make the most of their next two or three days' stay in this happy village, for as soon as the gorilla pelts have finished drying in the sun we start off once more, this time on our way to the big lake that you can see lying like a bar of silver on the distant horizon."

Nothing loth, the sixty stalwart bearers settled themselves to enjoy every moment of the allotted time, but circumstances alter cases, and they were destined after all not to spend even one more happy day with their new-found friends!

Although of so kindly and generous a nature, old Choma was nevertheless at the bottom of his heart a very vain man, and the first thing he did after arriving back at the village was to send a runner to the various chiefs beneath his rule giving them a glowing account of the deeds of his royal guest, not forgetting at the same time to impress upon the messengers the really noble part he himself had played in the battle with the apes. But he little guessed how far-reaching would be the results of this simple act of vanity.

Early in the forenoon of the very same day that Naju had ordered his following to make ready, two strangers rushed into the village. In and out between the huts they ducked and dived, only coming to a standstill at last in front of Choma himself, as he stood by the side of his dwelling, with Naju and Yidahonga and his headmen.

"O great Choma," said the elder of the two strangers, "we have been sent by our father the chief Seramani, whose kraal lies fifteen hours distant from here, to bring you word of the terrible misfortune that has befallen us in the form of a troop of man-eating lions who are daily destroying our people. By every means in our power have we sought to kill or capture these brutes, but so bold and fearless are they and so cunningly hidden their lair, that we can neither drive them away nor slay them.

"Then to our father word was brought of the brave doings of the noble Prince your guest, and how even the mighty black apes themselves have been attacked and beaten under his guidance. Thus we have been sent by Seramani to implore the great hunters to come at once and try at least to save some remnant of our people.

"Now, O chief, our task is ended, and as we are both famished, for many hours have fled since last we tasted food, I beg of you to call your slaves and bid them prepare us a meal."

As the men finished speaking and were led away by Choma, Naju turned to Yidahonga. "Don't delay one moment," he said, "but go at once and warn the bearers that we leave within the hour for this unfortunate village, for I have never yet seen one of these great cats, and it is above all else the one animal I wish to encounter."

Into the huts, searching for their various belongings, scuttled the excited bearers, whilst the pygmies, tugging the pegs out of the half-dry gorilla skins, hastily bound them into rough bundles.

Yet a few more moments were snatched in which to thank their generous hosts and bid them good-bye before they set off. Loth to lose such splendid guests, with them for a short distance went Choma; and even after they left him he stood for some time watching them as they filed along through the tall swaying mealie stems, headed by the little ape Piga, bearing proudly along his tiny milk-white friend Weupi.

Determined to reach the unhappy village with all possible speed, on through blazing noon-day heat

until the shadows of tree and shrub lay long across the grass, Naju led his following; but as the sun sank below the horizon and they came to a wide, deeply flowing stream, at last a halt was called.

"Let the cooks prepare a meal," he ordered, "and the pipes be lighted, for we must wait here until the moon rises, and then again hurry forward."

Dawn and a purple sunrise beheld them, footsore but undaunted, drawing near to Seramani's. Early though it still was, the chief himself came out to meet them, but no proud headman besmeared or bedecked with feathers or jingling bells strode at his heels. Only the chief alone, clad in a dingy cloak that flop-flopped as he walked, his thin, sorrow-laden face adorned with a thick fuzzy beard, presented himself.

But at the sight of the tall, strong, slim figure and handsome face of his rescuer, and the crowd of stalwart men at his heels, a ray of hope seemed to light up the sad old eyes, and with a remnant of former dignity he drew the cloak tighter around his thin body and stretched out a hand in greeting.

"It grieves me indeed," he said, "to receive such honoured guests in this poor fashion, but by this time my people are so demented with fear and sorrow that I have been obliged with my own hands to clean and prepare a hut for your reception."

"Waste no breath in such futile regrets, Seramani," answered Naju, "for under such sad circumstances we expect no such greeting as you mention and have come solely to try and rid your country of these terrible man-eaters. Let me remind you also that the sooner you can give us a plain and

full account of what has happened, then the sooner we can start to lay our plans."

Without another word Seramani turned and led the way to the village, a mere half-hundred grey mud huts clustering around the foot of a giant fig tree. Not a soul came out of the dwellings to gaze at the strangers as they passed, and it might well have been a village of the dead but for the thin curls of smoke that issued from several of the roofs.

Spreading some mats on the ground, Seramani seated himself in front of Naju and Yidahonga and, with the rest of the company grouped around, began his sorrowful tale.

"Only a few short months ago," he said, "and my village was as prosperous and thickly populated as any in the land. Every year, however, a number of the people were taken by lions; but believing as we do that the spirits of our dead and gone chiefs walk the earth again in the form of lions, we took very little notice, and for fear of drawing down their wrath, hesitated to hunt or slay any of them.

"As time went on however more and more were taken, until over a hundred people were killed and eaten, and it could no longer be borne, so the various warriors and hunters joined forces to try and destoy such fearful pests; but first, as a warning to the evil spirits of what they were about to do, the buried remains of several dead chiefs were dug up and burnt.

"Forming themselves into bands, our warriors set to work and searched every scrap of the sur-

rounding country, and although each day they found fresh tracks and followed them up, they led always to the same place, the dried mud of a river-bed where all trace of them became lost.

"And night after night, still the killing went on! Once it was an old man and his wife, who, anxious to avoid the noise of the village, had their hut some distance away. Tearing the poles of the roof asunder the lions dragged the two frail old bodies through, only to leave them partly eaten up the path where the hyænas came and finished the rest.

"Then again it was a young wife and her three children, returning from a gossip in a friend's hut; only the tiny skulls and feet of these were ever found again.

"At first the man-eaters would come only after dark; but gradually getting bolder and bolder, they began to attack the people working in the gardens in the broad daylight, and the women going to the water-holes.

"And this is the strangest part about it, the lions never came twice to the same place! One day, for instance, a man was killed and partly eaten in his garden in the early morning. The hunting party, fully expecting the man-eater to return and finish the feast at sundown, left the body just where it lay and hid themselves near by to wait. But lo and behold, as the time drew near word was brought to them that it was all in vain, for this time a woman had been killed and that, too, in a quite different direction.

"And so it went on, until the people became so crazy with fear and suspense that they took to

believing that the high priest of the village was himself causing all this horror by his communication with the evil spirits; so taking this man together with several other old people they ruthlessly murdered them and then burnt the bodies.

"And now to cap it all, it has been whispered to me that I, Seramani, their chief, am suspected. Can you wonder that when the messenger arrived from Choma, bringing the tale of your brave deeds, that I sent my sons hot-foot to beg you to come at once and save not only my life, but also those of my few remaining subjects?

"And that," he finished, "is all I can tell you excepting that as they are afraid to go to the gardens for fresh food or gather wood to cook it with, the whole population are on the verge of starvation. In the hut prepared for your use, however, you will find a quantity of foodstuffs which will, I hope, be sufficient to provide a meal for you and your following, for you must indeed be both hungry and weary after your long march."

"Now," said Naju, turning to his bearers, "you have heard for yourselves of the doings of these terrible man-eaters. If we are to succeed in killing these beasts, all the strength and endurance at our command will be required; so, in order to prepare yourselves, go now and first partake of a good meal, next take a much needed sleep, and in two hours' time gather together again beneath this same tree, and I will then tell you what we shall do."

Slowly out of their ghost-haunted huts the people came to stand around and gaze at the stalwart bearers stretched out in the shade calmly asleep, also to see

their handsome leader deep in discussion with his brawny henchman.

"How shall they succeed in ridding us of these pests when we have so signally failed?" passed through the minds of the men. "Nor can they restore to us our loved ones, and our many life-long friends and neighbours," mused the women.

Nevertheless in spite of these gloomy forebodings, the sight of such assured confidence sent a warm glow of comfort through their quaking hearts, and in any case, very little time was left to them to brood further over their misery, for, their sleep over, up jumped the bearers and away to carry out the commands of their Prince.

To the assembled company beneath the trees came also Seramani, and to him Naju gave the first order. "Make haste," he said, "to fetch out the very biggest drum the village boasts, and with it call the people together. Next, order them to bring out the hoes and baskets and yourself lead the way to the gardens to cut and bring back as many loads of foodstuff as they can carry. When they return, bid the women prepare a meal and serve it as soon as possible."

Next he turned to his bearers: "Half of you hurry away to the nearest woods and bring in some heavy logs, for big watch fires must be lit and kept burning during the night." To the other half he said: "Go and search for the trees with the longest, sharpest thorns, cut off the branches and drag them back here." Again and again he sent these men back for more thorns until at last high stockades were built around four of the largest huts.

As the sun dropped below the horizon, into two of them all the women and children were bundled, whilst into the remainder went all the men and youths.

In the opening at the back and front of each stockade bright fires were kindled, and four of the bearers, each with three or more heavy spears ready to hand, took up their places to keep watch and guard during the coming night.

Waiting until the noisy chattering in the huts died away to a low murmur, as one by one their occupants fell asleep, Naju, his tall figure outlined in the bright glow, came silently out to take a last look at his sentries, and a final glance round to assure himself that nothing further could be done to safeguard these poor unhappy people; then with a mind at ease betook himself back into the hut again, careful, however, to leave the door ajar.

From then onwards no movement disturbed the peace that descended on that benighted village; only the loud wailing calls of the many hyænas, attracted to the spot from miles around by the generous fare left over by the man-eaters, broke the silence. But for the first time in many a long day no partly gnawed bones, flung aside disdainfully by their lords the man-eaters, lay waiting to appease the greed of these vile scavengers; so flinging angry choking snarls of defiance at the twinkling fires, they slunk hastily away.

Their bodies refreshed by many hours of unbroken sleep, and their fears set at rest, the first golden rays of the rising sun brought the people hurrying pell mell out of their huts. Eager now

to help in every way to rid their village of the lions, all the women and children, carrying baskets on their heads, set off to the plantations with a dozen of Naju's hefty men, to act as bodyguard, bringing up the rear.

Without even waiting to be told, the men, taking their axes, went off to the nearest woods to bring back the logs for the fires that were to be kindled that night.

It was soon discovered that other eyes than those of the hyænas had seen and taken note of the change that had come over the scene of their orgies; for the lions too, startled by the fires and the disturbing smell of a host of men, had turned tail and stalked wonderingly back to their lairs.

Once the villagers were well away and about their several tasks, Naju, with Yidahonga and the two trackers, set out to search for some trace of the man-eaters. Knowing the stealthy cunning of the lions, not for one moment did they hope actually to see one of them. Still there was just a chance that some of them had prowled around outside the village during the night, and their spoor would show from which direction they hailed. One wide circle around the entire village proved that this was indeed the case, for in a patch of soft humid soil were found the deep clear imprints of lions' footmarks.

"It is a male, and a very old one too," said Naju after one glance at the size of the spoor, "and he was without doubt heading for the village intent on his evil mission, when something startled him and he turned and made back the way he had

come. Fortunately the spoor is fresh, and so easy for us to follow."

Without more ado they turned and for an hour or more carefully followed where the pug marks led, only to find however that, exactly as Seramani had forewarned, they led down into a river bed, and there all trace of them was lost in the dry, hard mud.

But nothing daunted, the men separated, and two by two searched thoroughly each side of the tree-clad banks, and although they persevered until long after the mid-day hour, not a sign did they find as to where the lions left the river bed.

Obviously, to hunt such cunning brutes in the daytime would be a mere waste of time, and the only thing that remained to be done was either to sit up at night over a bait, or trap them in some other way.

Back to the village to lay their plans went the hunting party, and there found that yet again the man-eaters had scored. This time it was a little girl who, unnoticed by her mother who was busily engaged in digging up sweet potatoes in the garden, had wandered away into the thick shrubs on the edge of the plot. The loud shrieks of the demented parent on seeing what had happened, brought two of the bearers hot-foot to the rescue, just in time to see a mangy old lioness making off, dragging the body as it went.

The next few steps, however, were to be the last that the beast was to take, for the bearers dashed after her, and one of them, surely throwing a spear, struck her through the heart, and she rolled over dead.

The little corpse, with the cruel teeth marks in its neck, had already been brought and laid in a hut, and by the side of it sat the stricken mother, rocking backwards and forwards, wailing dismally.

"This decides it," said Naju to Yidahonga, after listening to the sad tale, "we must delay no longer but speedily make arrangements to act this very night. The daring manner in which this old lioness attacked the child, under the very noses of all those people, shows only too clearly that, being unable to obtain their meat last night, the man-eaters are desperately hungry, and will stop at nothing. It would greatly astonish me if fires as big as houses would serve to keep them away to-night, so we must be ready.

"First call some of the bearers," he continued, "and go at once to the nearest deserted hut and drag out four strong poles; fix these deeply in the ground and arrange yet other poles on the top of them to form a platform well out of reach of a springing lion!"

That night again, as the sun went down, the people were driven into the stockaded huts and the watchmen came to take up their posts. But to-night no fires were to be lighted, and they were ordered to go well inside the wall of thorns and lay themselves flat on the ground.

The body of the lioness slain that day was hacked and split open, then dragged and placed where the meat would attract the hyænas and keep them clear away from the village, for one four-footed beast strangely resembles another when seen in the dusk.

Next the body of a dead goat was brought and laid in front of, and below, the wooden platform to attract the man-eaters to the spot. Then, up one of the corner poles of the same platform climbed Naju, with Yidahonga at his heels, each with a two-edged hunting knife tucked into his girdle, whilst on top of it they found, already laid there by the pygmies, several newly sharpened spears.

As if to aid them in their plans, the young moon stayed hidden behind a bank of dull grey clouds, but nevertheless every object beneath showed clear and distinct on the bare ground.

All sense of time fled from the watchers on the platform, but nothing moved, and very shortly, lulled by the soft, warm night air, they both fell fast asleep.

The hunting hour of all beasts of prey—between midnight and the dawn—drew near, and then rudely on the still night air rang out the sharp clacking bark of a jackal. Naju, instantly wide awake, sat up to listen, for when the king of beasts hunt, these scavengers follow ever closely on their heels.

Stretching out a hand, he laid it gently on Yidahonga's shoulder to rouse him, but so dead with sleep was the young Swahili already that he started violently and slid half-way over the edge of the narrow platform before Naju, grasping his arm, forcibly dragged him back into his place again.

Squeezing their bodies even closer down between the poles, with straining eyes they peered over the edge in every direction, and it was not long before their patience was rewarded.

Silently out from between the dwellings slunk

a long, lean grey shadow. For the space of a moment this shadow seemed to pause to listen, and that not more than four paces away from a group of watchmen, who, as they had been instructed beforehand, lay flattened to earth scarce daring to breathe.

Here with a vengeance was the enemy within the gates, but an enemy, be it said, very far from beaten. Even now the lioness, for such it was, stood there tense and motionless, ready at the faintest rustle to turn and bound away again.

This the watchers on the platform fully realised as they waited until the great cat, her suspicions allayed, should move forward to within reach of their spears.

But what was holding her back? Why did she still stand immovable, her two glowing eyes fixed unwaveringly ahead?

"It can't be that the wind has veered round and so carried a warning scent to her keen nostrils, or she would have turned and fled straight away!" thought Naju. "What, then, is she watching so intently?"

Unable any longer to overcome his curiosity, he slowly moved his head and peered in the same direction as the lioness, and there, padding slowly along towards the dead goat, came yet two other grey shapes!

Another fraction of a second and the new-comers would have reached the spot, but the lioness sprang suddenly to life, and with one bound planted her lithe form dead in the middle of their path. With head upraised and lips curled back she snarlingly

defied them to move one step nearer to the coveted meat.

The long tedious wait was over, and the moment to strike had come.

Taking one of the razor-edged spears, Naju, leaning over, thrust it skilfully through the body of the nearest beast, its own heavy weight carrying the weapon deeply into the body, and resulting in a roar of rage and a choking cough which told of the success of this first blow. Then, snatching up still a second spear, Naju dropped silently to the ground.

Unhappily, Yidahonga, who had also not been idle, had aimed his blow less truly and had only wounded a second lioness through the neck, and that by no means fatally. The gaunt dangerous brute, seeing Naju land on his feet within a few paces of her, instantly sprang at him, but, the gods be praised, one of the supporting poles of the platform barred her way, and to miss this she swerved ever so slightly and so landed short of her mark. Up on her hind legs she reared to claw him to death, but his arm instantly shot out and the keen hunting knife which he carried clove its way to her heart. Now madly throwing herself from side to side and biting viciously at the earth, she too soon lay still, never to rise again.

Following his leader's example, Yidahonga now also dropped to the ground and took his place by Naju's side. Shoulder to shoulder they stood to await the onslaught of the last and most powerful of the trio, for facing them, defiantly lashing his long tufted tail to and fro, stood a fierce old black-

MAN-EATERS.

Facing p. 80.

maned lion, eager to avenge the death of his two mates.

With beating hearts they watched the lean lithe body tauten as he crouched low for the spring, but as he rose into the air they cunningly fell apart and he landed between them. Giving him no time to draw himself together for a second charge, their two spears pierced his body, and then, jumping aside, stood well out of reach of the cruel claws. They then waited breathlessly for a space as the great beast lay on the ground, the blood slowly oozing from its nostrils, the deep panting breaths strangling in a last gasp.

He was a noble brute, and fought grimly for his life until the very end, but of no avail, for as ruthlessly as he had slain his many victims, so now his destroyers stood to watch him die. Aroused by the roaring and commotion of the fight, the villagers, flinging the doors of the huts wide open, poured out and surrounded the bodies of their foes. Lifting their spears, the men with bitter curses drove them again and again into the now limp and dead bodies of the destroyers of so many of their kinsmen.

Unwearied by the long hours of waiting, their already fierce appetites, whetted by the fresh cool morning air and the exciting events they had just passed through, Naju and Yidahonga, as soon as dawn had come, turned and strode away in search of the morning meal.

On opening the door of their hut, out bounded the liberated Piga. He rolled on the ground and squirmed with joy as Yidahonga pinched his hairy

back with hard strong fingers. The most amiable of all creatures under the sun, this young ape was ever ready to gambol and romp; he never wearied or became impatient, and possessed an appetite that turned even the ever-hungry bearers green with envy.

Early as it still was, the cooks had prepared a meal and laid the reed mats in readiness beneath the big tree.

Followed, as always, by his inseparable comrade Weupi, Piga ambled backwards and forwards after the men carrying the foodstuffs, then, when all were seated, contentedly took his place between the two leaders and amiably accepted tit-bits first from one and then from the other. So pleased was he with life in general that, even when Weupi forced open his mouth and took out a handful of rice, he showed no resentment and only watched her curiously as she put it into her own.

Having loudly smacked his lips and heartily enjoyed all they chose to give him, Piga next rose and ambled off on a visit to other good friends of his. The bearers, having just finished a well-deserved meal, left him alone to help himself to what remained. Carefully he peered into every pot, but of them all he fancied a mess of mushrooms and crushed nuts. After that the vivid colouring of some ground chillies caught his roving eye, so he tasted these liberally and started sneezing violently, whereupon he dashed for the nearest drinking-vessel and plunged his burning mouth into the cold water.

All who had taken part in the events of the

night followed the example set by their leader and, stretching themselves in the shade, slept heavily while the sun rose hot in the heavens.

Seramani, assisted by his sons, spent the time in removing the hearts and all the fat from the lion carcases—the former to be first dried in the sun, then pounded and mixed with medicine, the latter to be tried out and stored for smearing on the body as a spell against death by lions.

Having finished his task and realising that no preparations had yet been begun for that night's campaign, Seramani fetched out the biggest drum and beat such a thundering tattoo on it that many of Naju's men, suffering violently from indigestion, through sleeping too soon after a heavy meal, leapt to their feet while still half asleep, fully expecting at the very least to find the lions in possession of the whole village.

CHAPTER V

Untried Warriors and the Last of the Man-eaters

THE new plan to be tried that night required only the very simplest preparations, and for the purpose a big hut was chosen whose former occupants had long ago fallen victims to the lions. This hut stood well away from the other dwellings; its door was a hingeless one and only kept in its place by two stout poles firmly fixed in the ground on either side of the doorway. How little the dead maker of that strong reed doorway realised that it would one day play a large part in avenging his own fate and actually be the means of trapping two of the murdering man-eaters that had killed him!

"H'm!" ejaculated the women of the village as they came that same day at sunset to view the final arrangements, "only to think that it was left to this brave Prince to come here and point out to us this simple but certain way of trapping lions! How does it come about that none of our own men could think of such a plan?" They were right, for simple it certainly was—merely two blocks of wood, the length of a man's arm, placed beneath the raised-up door; these, when jerked away by a cord, would allow it to drop

back into its groove between the supporting poles. But before the door could be shut on the lions it was first necessary to entice them into the hut. For this purpose the carcases of the two dead lionesses slain the previous night were dragged inside to serve as bait.

"Now there only remains for someone to sit up a nearby tree and work the ropes," said Naju, "and who better than Amani and Amisi?"

So having eaten their share of the evening meal, as the dusk fell the two tiny brown men came to take up their posts. These little fellows had not the slightest intention of providing a meal for any old man-eater, so skirting around the foot of the tree selected for the purpose on hand, they carefully picked out a forked branch well out of reach from the ground, and climbing up to it, they cut and broke the thicker twigs to form two small seats. Next taking some long strips of bark, they bound themselves securely to the trunk of the tree, for might not a sleeping pygmy easily fall to the ground, and also might there not be a lion waiting below to pounce on him?

More than anything else in the world these two silent creatures loved a smoke, so once up in their lofty nest they settled happily down, for their little plaited bags bulged with mellow tobacco—a gift from the grateful villagers. Born as they were in the dark impenetrable forest, these impish creatures could see as clearly in the dark as in the daylight; their patience also knew no limit, so as the long hours slid slowly by, never for a moment did their vigilance relax.

And then suddenly across an open space they saw a sight that, cautious hunters though they both were, nearly drove them to shout aloud, for stalking stealthily along, carrying in his great jaws the dangling body of a man, went a huge old maned lion. Even to attempt to go to the rescue was out of the question, for they were armed only with short skinning knives, and in any case it would be too late; the man was assuredly dead, for the lion, unlike the leopard, never tortures, but breaks the neck of its prey with one swift blow. Calling out was also useless and would only drive away any other lions that might by chance be prowling around the trap. They could therefore only sit helplessly, wondering to themselves who the man was and how he had been taken in spite of all precautions.

Not for long however were they left to wonder, for from still another direction, stalking slowly along, stopping every now and then to suspiciously sniff the wind, came yet two other of the dread marauders. Their noses led them straight to the door of the hut, but to them the open door savoured suspiciously of a trap which made them for a time pace slowly backward and forward in front of it. At last however their fierce appetites overcame their natural caution, and they entered. Then passed a breathless moment, until the sounds of crunching and snarling told the watchers that the lions were both well inside the hut and fully occupied.

A quick jerk of the ropes and the two blocks of

wood fell away whilst the door shut down with a loud reassuring bang.

Then on the still night air rang out the pre-arranged signal—two shrill blasts on an ivory horn.

Waiting only to hear the answering notes, the little men dropped lightly to the ground and raced with all speed to their comrades. Only a few short days had passed, but even so a marvellous change had taken place in Seramani's people. With four of their long-time enemies slain or captured, life to them again became worth the living. No longer was it deemed necessary for the sentries to sleep outside the stockades, and even the pygmies, their task now finished, packed themselves into the already crowded dwellings with their brethren, to sleep.

In another hut, by the side of a small log fire, sat their young leader with his henchman Yida-honga. Nothing was further from their thoughts than to fall asleep, for whilst even one of the man-eaters remained alive danger still threatened the people. With well-filled pipes aglow they talked in low tones of the varied happenings through which they had passed since leaving Dungundega's kingdom, only pausing every now and then to listen for the bugle call by which they might know that yet other of the man-eaters had fallen into their hands.

Then, as they sat thus, through the open doorway stepped the figure of the chief, Seramani. With astonishment they gazed up at him, for what could have brought him out at such an hour of the night ? The cause however was not far to seek, for if the

rank and file of the village people were thankful for their deliverance from the man-eaters, how much more so was he, their chief. No longer did the fear of a horrible death at the hands of his own kinsmen hang like a sword over Seramani's head, and he owed all to this brave young Prince and his no less brave companion.

His old thin face lit up as they smilingly nodded in reply to his genial greeting and motioned him to take a seat by the fire. Before seating himself, however, and after fumbling about in the folds of his worn cloak, he too pulled out a pipe and plugged it with tobacco, and picking up a live ember, lit it and then squatted down.

"You are right," he commenced at last, as if in answer to their unspoken thoughts, "only a matter of the greatest importance could have driven me to leave the shelter of my own dwelling and risk running into a slinking lion to reach you here. However let me begin my story and you will soon know the reason for yourselves.

"It is possible that to-day you may have seen how the bodies of our women were bedecked with trailing streamers of mauve blossoms. Those are the flowers of the strophanthus plant from whose seed-pods is obtained the deadly poison for the arrows. Many a long day has passed since last the people were able to search the woods for this shy plant, but yesterday they did so, and to-day the women, following an old-time custom, decorated themselves with the flowers whilst they crushed the pods and prepared the poison. I have only mentioned this however," Seramani explained,

" as, together with what I am about to tell you next, it bears on the reason for my visit here to-night.

" You must know that during every third year in all the villages of our tribe, a big ceremony is held when every youth of twelve years or more is put through a very severe test. If he passes this test of manhood, then special cicatrices are cut upon his body which mark him as a warrior, and from that time on, until he dies, he does nothing but fight or hunt—he has no other work to do! If, on the other hand, he fails the test, he must for the rest of his days work in the plantations or help to build the villages.

" In this great test there are two stages. For the first one, all those who are to take part in it are on a certain day gathered together and they are handed a bow and arrow, a spear and a small axe. They are then driven far away from their homes or any habitation and for three moons must fend for themselves. But hunger is ever an exacting master, and very soon they become skilled in trapping and killing both beast and bird and find out also where grow the biggest mushrooms and the sweetest wild fruits.

" At the end of the three moons, those who are left—for alas, many of the weaklings die of starvation or sickness—return to their homes, there to pass the final test, the circumcision and tattooing ceremony. When this takes place some of the oldest and wisest of our people are called upon to act as judges. If during this final ceremony a boy cries out or even flinches, he is deemed unworthy

ever to become a warrior, and the time he has spent away in the wilds is counted as nought.

"And now," continued Seramani, "comes the real reason why I risked my life to reach you here to-night. Not so very long ago one of these ceremonies was held in this village, and it was a band of these young newly created warriors who set themselves to hunt down the man-eaters, only, as you know, to meet with failure. But now, inspired by your noble example, O Prince, eager to prove themselves worthy of their newly earned title, and at the same time to stand well in the eyes of their future brides, they have chosen me as their spokesmen to beg you that if any lions be caught in the trap to-night they alone may be allowed to slay them."

"And where are these warriors?" asked Naju, as, Seramani having finished his tale, they all three rose to their feet.

"They are all together in my hut eagerly awaiting your answer, O Prince."

"Ah," said Naju, smiling, "now I understand why the women have prepared the poison to-day! Well," placing a hand on the chief's shoulder, "hurry away at once and tell these brave lads that I am filled with admiration for their courage and not only will I give the desired permission but will come myself and watch the fray, that is, if luck favours our efforts this night."

Happy to be the bearer of such glad tidings, Seramani, forgetful now of prowling lions, turned and without another word left the hut. But Naju

and Yidahonga, taking their spears, followed him out, and standing by the doorway, waited until the sound of voices warned them that he was once more safely between the walls.

Unwilling to go back into the smoky, stuffy hut, and happy to stretch limbs cramped with long squatting over a fire, they paced slowly backwards and forwards. The night was far advanced, and the first faint stirrings of the dawn rustled the leaves on the trees before the musical signal, awaited with such eagerness, clove the still air like a knife. Before even the last note had died away, crash went the doors of every hut and out tumbled the people. Towards the spot, well ahead of the crowd, strode Naju and his henchman with Seramani and the warriors close at their heels, whilst the rest of the crowd brought up the rear.

Racing to meet them came the pygmies, their round eyes wide with excitement.

"There are two lions caught in the trap," said Amani, the eldest, "and we have seen yet a third one carrying away the body of a man!"

Scarcely believing his own ears, Naju gazed sternly from one to the other of the small pair.

"Impossible," he said; "you failed in your duty, fell asleep and dreamt it."

Gazing reproachfully up into his face, they made no reply to this but sped away to the nearest dwelling, and snatching handfuls of grass from the roof, lit them at a fire and were soon back again. Straight to the spot where the lion had passed with his dead victim they led the way, and holding the flaring torches close to the ground, pointed solemnly

to the deep fresh spoor and the marks where a heavy body had been dragged along the ground. It was only too true, then; but who could the man be, and how had it happened?

A very few moments sufficed to find that out. This time at least Seramani's unfortunate people had been spared, for when Naju called his following together and bade them stand in a row it was soon discovered that instead of sixty stalwart slaves only fifty-nine answered the call.

Nor did they ever find out how the man was taken, for when the daylight came, search how they would, no sign of a struggle or even a spot of blood was found. They could only believe that he had wandered out in his sleep and fallen straight into the jaws of the great cat, stealthily biding its time in the shadows.

Impatient though they were to begin the fray and prove what they really could do, nevertheless the yet untried warriors followed their hero's advice, when he bade them wait until the daylight before opening the door of the hut in which the lions lay entrapped. At four points around it they kindled fires, lighting up the scene with the brightness of day. Squatting around the hut, they waited eagerly, listening meanwhile to the commotion made by the furious captives as they sought to escape. Round and round they dashed, leaping at the roof and fighting and snarling with each other.

Further sleep being out of the question, the people betook themselves slowly back to the village

and, sitting in groups on the ground, talked of the exciting events of the night. Then, as the first faint glimmerings of light spread across the sky, and as if in defiance of the whole world, came the ever awe-inspiring thunderous roar of a solitary old male lion, wishing his brethren to know that, thanks be to his fortunate kill, he at least was gorged to the uttermost, and off to his carefully hidden lair to sleep the day away. Holding their breath, the people listened for an answering call, that they might know if there were other lions abroad or if, as they hoped, this old male was the last of the bunch.

Following quickly on the heels of the dawn came the pageant of the sunrise. At first a soft grey sky, then tinged with rose, and then, changing suddenly, a burst of flame as the great golden orb pushed its way up through the shrouding mists that lay low on the horizon.

The captives, weary with their futile efforts to escape, lay still. Peeped at through a crack in the pole and daga wall, two pairs of golden eyes and two lashing tails were to be seen. A young maneless lion could be made out, standing protectingly by the side of his crouching mate.

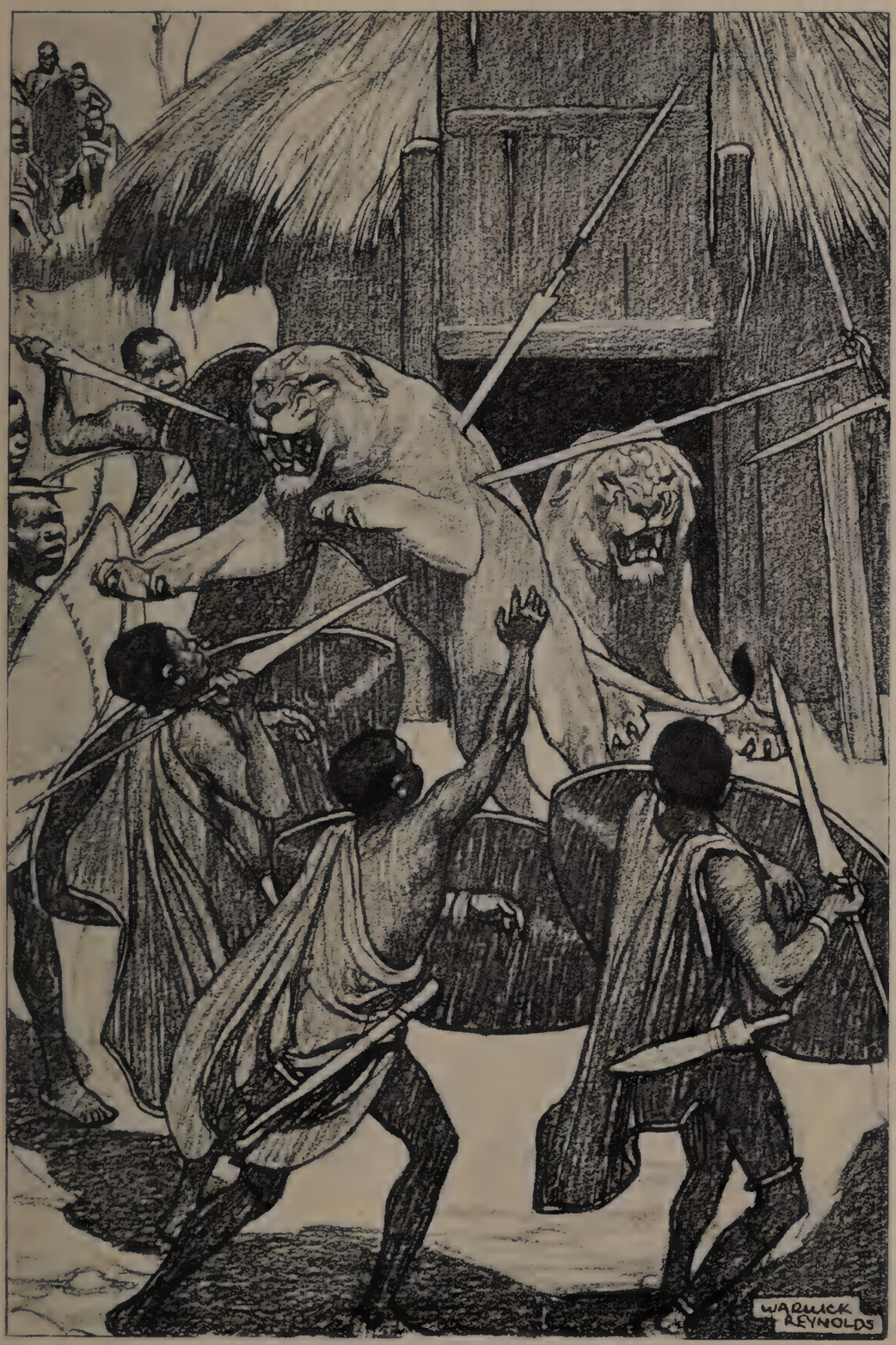
All the women and children were permitted to come and take one look; then they were speedily hustled away into the safety of the huts with a guard at the door to see that none came out until the danger was past. Naju's following, together with all the village men, swarmed up on to the nearest roofs to watch the coming fray, having already been cautioned that, no matter what took

place, it was none of their business to come to the rescue or interfere in any way.

Marching proudly in single file on to the scene came the young warriors, their naked bodies gaily daubed and streaked with red and white clay. Holding the thick hide shields to form a wall, they placed themselves in a half-circle before the door, hands grasping gleaming spears upraised to strike. Others with bows and poisoned arrows stood a few paces back ready to shoot in the event of an escape, and the youngest of the band, a lad of very few years, took his place by the side of the closed door waiting to pull it open.

Naju, standing a few paces back, raised his arm to give the signal that the moment for action had now come, when, without warning and with a loud cracking noise, one of the overladen roofs caved in. Inopportune though the mishap was, it drew forth merry shouts of laughter as the discomfited men, one by one, scrambled out from beneath the heap of fallen poles and bolted for the nearest roof. The second time however there was no delay. The signal fell and the waiting youth, grasping the pulley, tugged with all his might. Inch by inch the heavy door with a harsh grating scrape slid back between the supporting poles, revealing the dark interior of the hut with its two crouching inmates.

In the breathless moment before the lions came out Naju cast a final hurried glance at the faces of the warriors, but not one of them so much as flinched. They stood as straight and immovable as a row of saplings, their mouths agape revealing



TWO LEAN, TAWNY STREAKS.

Facing p. 94

white glistening teeth, their eyes flashing in the sunlight. Then he too turned to watch the open doorway as side by side two lean tawny streaks sprang through the air straight on to the waiting spears.

The first to reach them was the lioness, and mortally wounded though she was in her first rush, still eager to escape, she took a flying leap over the nearest of the warriors, who sought to bar her way, and with her hind claws lashed at his shoulder in passing, tearing the flesh open to the bone. In a flash he turned, speeding after her and before many paces, and, watched by the straining eyes of the multitude, he pinned her to the ground with a well-aimed spear-thrust. Then, jerking the weapon out without a second look at his dying foe, this bold youth turned and raced back to his comrades.

The young male lion, on the other hand, made no move to escape, but with the blood from several wounds staining the honey-coloured fur, decided to sell his life dearly. He crouched low, then with a surly, snarling roar sprang at the nearest of his attackers. Brave and fearless though they were, and confident in their youthful strength, the one thing above all others these ambitious warriors had yet to learn—and only experience could teach them—was the lightning-like swiftness of a lion's spring. Although instantly all turned and sped to the rescue of their comrade, it was already too late. The shield flew out of the warrior's hand as the infuriated lion, its teeth fixed in the slender neck of its victim, bore him swiftly to the ground.

Then the intrepid brute at once turned to face his other assailants and crouched to spring yet again, but this time too late. With such force did a dozen spears pierce his body, that the razor-like edges gritted together as they flew, and the beast fell dead across the body of the dying warrior.

It might well come about that during their lives these youthful hunters would slay other lions or equally dangerous foes, but never again would it rouse them to the same pitch of enthusiasm as did this, their first kill. With shields and spears both held aloft they danced madly in a ring round and round the bodies of the lions, yelling with triumph, whilst down from their lofty perches on the tops of the houses, helter-skelter tumbled the onlookers to join in the song of victory. There was no gainsaying the fact that every member of the band had more than earned his right to the title of warrior, for not one of them had flinched or shirked the dangerous task. Waiting until the song had ended, Naju, shaking each of them by the hand, invited them to join him in the morning meal: "For I am proud," said he, "to know such brave youths as you have proved yourselves to-day."

Dragging aside the body of the lion, willing hands lifted the dead warrior and carried him away to the hut of his parents, to be prepared for a burial ceremony fitting so brave a death.

Then arose the question of the other equally brave victim, whose torn and lacerated shoulder called for attention; but who was there to purify

his wounds and so prevent certain and almost always fatal blood-poisoning from the cruel claws ? Now it was that Seramani's people, cured of their former madness, first felt the loss of their murdered medicine man, for not one amongst them possessed the knowledge required in a case of this kind, and, even now, the wounds were beginning to swell and every moment's delay increased the danger.

"Then go fetch me a firestick," said Naju, "for it is a thousand pities that this youth should die, as he undoubtedly will unless something is done."

When they brought it to him, he first blew away the white ashes, leaving only the clean glowing tip. This he thrust deeply into every wound until even the small scratches were cauterised. Yida-honga next lifted the now unconscious lad, and carrying him into a hut laid him down on a pile of soft banana leaves, whilst one of the village grand-mothers, skilled in the science of herbs, set off to the woods to search for some healing roots and plants.

The invitation from Naju to join him at the evening meal had set a seal on the happiness of the warriors, for he was their hero, and from the first moment of his arrival amongst them, they each and all cherished an ambition to become like him. Proud and happy, they trooped behind their chief as he led them across to the big tree where every-thing lay in readiness for the feast, and where Naju awaited them.

Piga, the ape, unaccustomed to such a crowd, was,

in the beginning, doubtful where to place himself, so adopted a middle course, and dodged from one to another. On ordinary occasions his behaviour at meals was all that could be desired, but to-day he too suffered from an excess of high spirits, and finding himself unnoticed during the telling of a particularly good joke, plunged his hand into a nearby pot. It is quite possible that this little lapse from good manners would have passed unheeded, but unfortunately the handful of potage he brought out burnt him, and he dropped it splash on to the mat. For this disgraceful behaviour he was at once banished from the feast, but quite unashamed was soon gazing calmly around for something else with which to pass the time.

The next moment he spied a woman steaming a big pot of plantains over a log fire, so, accompanied by Weupi, he quickly made his way to the spot and, squatting down in front of the fire, gazed from the pot up into the woman's face with such a pleading look in his knowing little eyes that she, kind soul, fished out a handful of the contents and laid them on the ground to cool. In the twinkling of an eye Piga cleaned up his portion, then grasping his lady friend by her long tail, firmly confiscated her share as well. There was nothing new in this kind of treatment however and Weupi bore him no malice, but only followed meekly after him when he wandered away in search of further mischief.

After the meal Seramani called to his women to bring the pipes, and to each of the company he

handed a tight little ball of tobacco; so, seated or squatting in the cool shade, they smoked contentedly.

In Yidahonga's mind lay no shadow of a doubt as to how he intended passing the long hot hours of the afternoon. Carefully choosing the most comfortable spot, he propped his back against the trunk of the big tree, and with lolling head and mouth agape blatantly fell asleep.

For so long had Seramani and his people existed under a pall of fear and suspense that all thoughts of a world outside their own small circle had dwindled from their minds; but now, freed from the menace of the man-eaters, they remembered afresh the existence of many a well-known place and favourite spot. Amongst others they talked of a little lake that lay within an hour's walk from the village.

"It has always been a matter for wonder to our people how so perfect a spot came to exist in this flat and otherwise uninteresting country," said Seramani to Naju, ever an interested listener where the world around him was concerned, "but there it is, and every day droves of wonderful water birds flock to it from all directions."

"What you say of this little lake makes me eager to see it for myself, so will you look for a man to show me the way."

"Here at last is an opportunity to serve our hero," thought the listening warriors. "We, ourselves, and no other shall lead him where he wishes to go."

Not one of them intended to be left out of the

affair if they could help it, so up they sprang and scattered in all directions in search of bows and arrows, whilst at the back of their minds also lay a tiny hope that some other adventure might turn up by the way; but never for a moment did they dream of what was actually in store for them.

The first part of the journey lay through the village plantations, and they followed a tiny track meandering amidst fields of monkey nuts. Even in the hottest part of the day the leaves of these little plants never drooped or lost their fresh green colour, whilst from between them peeped tiny yellow bean flowers, which would later grow down into the earth and there form the sweet oil-laden nuts.

Next they passed through row after row of tall swaying maize stems, each laden with three or more milky corn cobs, whose long silky brown and purple tassels waved in the breeze. Running riot between the rows grew trailing cucumber and pumpkin plants, their yellow or white star-shaped blooms mingling together where the strong tendrils of either plant crept along the ground or wound themselves up the maize stems from the tips of which they dangled in feathery festoons. The way led also through groves of shady banana palms, many of them so weighted with sagging bunches of unpicked fruit that only a sturdy forked stick propped beneath the stems kept them from falling right over.

Once clear of the plantations on they went through open country; mile after mile of sweet thick grass surrounded them. But there was one

thing missing from this otherwise perfect picture, for no lordly dappled buck or sleek doe browsed their way across the green carpet, neither did the mark of a hoof break the smooth surface of the ground, not even those of a common wild pig. Here then, thought Naju as he walked along, most probably lies the very cause of all the sorrow and unhappiness that has fallen on Seramani's village, for the lions starved through lack of other meat have been driven to turn man-eaters.

When drawing near to the little lake it behoved them to walk very warily, for nothing in creation are so quick sighted or easily driven away as the wild, timid water birds. At last they passed through a thick belt of trees, and on coming out at the other side, paused, silently grouped together, to gaze at the fairy-like scene spread out before them. For, on the edge of the lakelet, at its widest not more than two hundred paces across, thousands of dignified flamingoes strutted and stepped, their delicate pink plumage and vivid scarlet beaks and legs reflected in the deep blue water, whilst in and out amongst the spreading leaves of the violet water lilies, graceful inky black swans swam lazily.

At these latter the warriors, unstringing their bows, took careful aim, and, telling of the good marksmanship, many of the finest cock birds with a loud squawking rose fluttering in the air, but only to fall back dead with wings flapping aimlessly on the water. Leaving Naju alone, his companions sped across the strip of sand, and throwing themselves with loud shouts into the water swam to fetch their

prizes. They brought back several splendid birds, and laying them in the shade again bounded joyfully back to the lake, some to float about on the warm water, others to dig for the crisp roots of the water lilies.

Leaving them thus to their youthful gambols, Naju now set off alone with the intention of walking round to the other side of the water; he had not gone far however when he suddenly stopped dead in his tracks, and with a loud hallo shouted for his companions, who came tumbling from the water, snatching up their weapons as they came. Nor was it necessary for Naju to even point out what he had discovered, for the veriest fool could have not failed to see for himself. In the soft warm sand the clear fresh spoor of a lion showed itself, leading first up to and then away from the water's edge, and the sharp unbroken edges of the pug-marks told plainly enough that only a few short hours ago His Majesty the King of Beasts had passed that way!

The tiny seed of hope dormant in the hearts of the warriors when they set out from the village that some little adventure might happen their way, had borne fruit with a vengeance. If a tiny doubt crept into their minds that the next few hours would see them biting off a bigger mouthful than they could chew, they bravely stifled it, for their hero could do no wrong, and let him lead where he would they would follow. So they stood around eagerly waiting for Naju to make the first move.

"Of all the fools ever born," he said to them,

"I am the very biggest, for why did it never occur to me that the man-eaters, like every other animal, must have water? What a lot of trouble and delay might have been saved if in the very beginning we had kept a careful watch at the various water-holes! However only experience teaches fools to be wise, and now, unfortunately, just when he is most needed, that fat pig Yidahonga has been left behind in the village. Well, it can't be helped, and we must carry on without him; but it is a sad pity, for I prophesy that the slaying of this last old man-eater will be worth all the others put together."

The pygmy trackers also had been left behind, so there was nothing else for it—he himself must take up the spoor. Off they started in single file, and before very long came to the same dry river-bed that had so baffled their efforts in the beginning. But in this case, instead of leading down on to the dry mud, the footmarks led along the bank itself. Trailing bramble bushes scratched their naked bodies and sharp rocks cut their feet, but a few small discomforts of that kind pass unnoticed to a hunter stalking his quarry. In some places they were even driven to drop down on to their hands and knees, and creep through the well-nigh impenetrable creepers, whilst time and again, when passing over hard patches of dry ground, the spoor itself was lost; but then, on making a wide circle around the spot from whence it was last seen, it was again found, and always leading on.

The sun dropped lower and lower in the sky, and a fear crept into the minds of the hunters

that the darkness would fall, and so for that day at least end the search. But these fears were unfounded, for very shortly afterwards they came out on to a small clearing between the trees, at one end of which yawned the narrow entrance into a rocky cave. The churned-up sand before it and a sickly smell that hung over the spot told that here at last was the home of the man-eaters!

With bated breath the little band of men waited on the edge of the trees, for if any of the great cats were within the cave, then the slightest sound would warn them of the approach of their enemies, and any instant a furious lion might launch itself in their midst. But not even a rustle broke the stillness, so holding up his hand for the others to follow, Naju turned and stole softly back a few paces, for having succeeded thus far, a definite plan must be arranged if they were to carry this venture through to a victorious finish. Then only did it dawn on Naju that his was the only spear amongst the party, for his companions were armed only with bows and arrows and their long hunting-knives. However the courage of these youthful hunters had been pretty fairly tested once that day, and they could be relied on to do all in their power to prevent the escape of their quarry.

They listened carefully to all he said, then crept silently back and surrounded the cave. One intrepid youth even swarmed up on to the rocks and sat perched over the entrance itself, a big knife held ready in his hand. Directly facing the entrance

stood Naju, and to the right of him the self-same youth who had that morning pulled back the door of the trap, ready at a sign to fling a handful of stones into the cave. But not until Naju had taken a final glance round at his henchmen and assured himself that they were ready, did he give the eagerly awaited signal.

This was indeed fortunate, for the very first stone thrown drew forth its answer, and with a deep angry growl there appeared, framed in the entrance of the cave, a superb old male lion. The coarse black mane hung low to the ground and the rest of his body lay hidden in the shadow of the setting sun; two eyes glared balefully out of a dusky setting as he paused for an instant to gaze insolently around. In lordly contempt the massive head turned in every direction, but at last the glowing eyes fixed themselves on Naju's own. The wide lips parted and he snarled softly, showing the great yellow fangs behind.

Down on the ground the great beast crouched and with his hind legs viciously scattering a shower of sand behind him, the long lithe body flew through the air. . . .

Stepping back a pace, Naju raised his arm and with all the strength of his sinewy body thrust the heavy spear into the hurtling mass before him, and almost at the same moment darted aside.

Then there followed a death struggle terrible to witness in its ferocity, as the stricken beast made frantic attempts to bite at the spear in its body. The weapon had however done its work, and as the blood flowed the angry roars ceased.

Before moving forward to deal the lion its death-blow, Naju paused for an instant to wonder at the unconquerable courage that yet blazed from the gold-green eyes. But to drive the pity from his heart came a vision of Seramani's village with its stricken people as he had first seen them, also of his own lost bearer.

Hesitating no longer, he stepped forward and ruthlessly stabbed this last of the man-eaters through the heart.

CHAPTER VI

Ivory Armlets or a Reward for Valour

As the long, honey-coloured body lay stretched on the red sand, a vision of his mother's chamber rose before Naju, its walls adorned by the many rare and wonderful pelts that had been brought from all parts of the country. The skin of this old man-eater, with its flowing black mane, was well worth a place amongst them, and "how proud too," he thought, "would Aruscha be to possess such a gift from her son."

Before resuming his journey to the big lake several of the bearers would be returning to the Ruanda carrying the gorilla pelts as a gift to Dungundega; then the lion-skin also, he decided, should go to his mother at the same time.

Unfortunately, when setting out on this afternoon's adventure, the two pygmies had been left behind in the village, and the question now was how to remove the skin. The sun was already low on the horizon, and fearing that the hyænas would tear the body of the lion should it be left out all night unguarded, Naju himself set to work, and with the willing help of his young comrades the skin was soon removed and bound to a long pole.

In southern lands the night follows all too quickly on the heels of the departing day, and by the time they had finished their task it was much too dark to find their way back along the spoor. Having to wait therefore for the moon to rise, and at the same time being very weary, some dry sticks were collected and a bright fire kindled, around which in the warm glow they settled contentedly down to wait.

Not for long however were they left undisturbed, for very shortly afterwards and, strange to say, just as the moon appeared over the tree-tops, from somewhere close at hand arose a fœtid smell as of rotting meat. Seeming to rise with the chill night mist, it became more and more pungent, and at last so unbearable that they were driven to try to find and remove the cause, whatever it might be.

Using long handfuls of elephant grass as torches, they carefully searched each clump of bushes in the vicinity, expecting to find at least the remains of a grisly feast; but not even a bone or a scrap of skin rewarded their efforts, so there only remained either to move away to a fresh spot or grin and bear it.

They refused however to be driven from the bright fires, and were about to again reseat themselves in their places on the ground, when an angry exclamation from the top of the rocks caused them to glance quickly up, to see one of their comrades hopping frantically from one leg to the other, his face drawn into a grin of agony.

The thought at once flashed through their minds that he had trodden on a snake and been stung;

if so, what an unfortunate ending to so bright a day!

Quickly they scrambled up, and it was with a sigh of relief when, on stooping down to look where he pointed, they saw, instead of a wriggling slimy reptile, merely a small clump of cacti nestling amongst the rocks.

But not by any means as innocent as it looked was this sturdy plant, for on either side of its grey triangular stems grew twisted rows of needle-like thorns, and it was against these vicious points that the unfortunate youth had stumbled.

Perched precariously on the very tips of the tough fibrous stems, for all the world as if they had been blown there by the breeze and caught on the thorns, grew clusters of auricula-like flowers, their green bell-shaped blooms surrounded with a border of blood-red. The fantastic shape and colouring of the plant at once drew Naju's attention, and picking one of the clusters and bending to examine it more closely, an exclamation of disgust escaped him, for here was the cause of the nauseating, death-like smell that had so disturbed them.

Unwilling to believe that these innocent flowers had almost succeeded in driving them away, he continued to gaze at the bunch with unbelieving eyes, and his companions too noticing his abstraction, also came to look. From the palm of Naju's hand the evil blooms glared balefully up, greeting each in turn with their fœtid smell.

Cutting off another cluster and impaling both on the tip of his knife, Naju slung them into the

heart of the embers, and as they sizzled and sputtered spitefully he thought how fitting an emblem they were of the sinister beasts of prey, who had for so long inhabited the cave in the rocks over which they grew.

To add fresh brightness to the scene, another armful of logs was now thrown on the fire, and again they settled down to wait.

At first the youths talked softly amongst themselves of the events of this never-to-be-forgotten day, but becoming drowsy, one by one they fell asleep.

Then it was that the stealthy footsteps of slinking hyænas could be heard. Attracted by the freshly slain meat and becoming bolder as the group around the fire remained silent, but keeping always just beyond the circle of light, they cautiously drew nearer and nearer, until a well-aimed burning log shedding trails of sparks as it sailed through the air sent them bounding away, only to return, however, when all was quiet again.

Then later on, as the moon climbed up the sky, lighting the scene with the brightness of day, two of the youths cheerfully shouldered the heavy lion-skin and, led by Naju, who marched ahead to pick out the track, set off to return to the village. Then it was that the snarling hyænas were left in undisputed sway of the small camp, to fight and growl over the lean carcase left lying there.

They came at last to the little lake lying like a pool of silver in the bright light of the full moon. The dead swans were quickly slung on to the pole with the lion skin, and after a short rest and a

much-needed drink of the cold water, hungrily crunching the water-lily roots, they pushed on with more ease along the now well-worn path.

As they drew near the village little twinkling fires greeted them, for the people, it seemed, still awaited their return. Heartened by the sight, they broke into a run and soon found themselves passing triumphantly in between rows of friendly eager faces.

Awaiting them beneath the fig tree stood Yidahonga. On awaking from his sleep that afternoon he had at first been very angry on finding that he had been deliberately left behind. But as the afternoon advanced, and the sun went down, with still no sign of Naju's return, anxiety gave place to anger, and he was now both relieved and thankful to see his chief returning and to know that he had come to no harm.

Yidahonga had previously instructed the cooks to make ready a hearty meal, to be served instantly their master returned, so at his bidding they carried in the big pots of savoury-smelling meats and placed them on the mats, around which Naju and his famished but happy companions at once took their places.

About the group hovered a crowd of relations and friends, all eager to hear where this last of the man-eaters had been found, and how he had been slain; even their comrade, whose shoulder had been so cruelly torn, sat waiting to hear the story.

Naju, like all truly brave men, was no great talker where his own deeds were concerned, and

so, propped comfortably against the trunk of the big tree, his pipe glowing brightly, he preferred to listen as his young companions described the various events leading up to the death of the old lion. Seeing how engrossed they were, and finding himself unnoticed even by Yidahonga, he then quietly rose and, slipping away under cover of the giant tree, passed across into his own hut.

He was very weary, so, pausing for a moment only to caress Piga and Weupi, who ran to greet him, he lay down and was soon fast asleep.

In this wild country it was no uncommon occurrence for several men together to hunt down and spear a lion, but for a youth alone and armed only with a spear to dare to face and slay such a dangerous beast as an old man-eater, filled the people with wonder and admiration, and having heard the full story, they turned to gaze at this brave Prince, only to find that he had disappeared.

So grateful were they to be at last delivered from the scourge of the lions that they longed there and then to prostrate themselves on the ground and offer him their heartfelt thanks; but alas, he had foiled them, for the time being at any rate. However, they were holding a big dance of celebration on the morrow, and he would have to be more than cunning to escape them a second time, so chuckling gaily amongst themselves, they separated and went into their huts.

The whole village was early astir the following day, and hour after hour the preparation for a great feast went on. Women chanted softly as

with primitive pestles and mortars they pounded the husk from the grain, handing it in turn to others for the sifting process, whose work it then was to grind the clean grain between the smooth polished stones that were to be seen standing by the side of every door.

Little shiny black piccanins jabbered and quarrelled ceaselessly as they swept the dancing-ground clean of stick and stone; while the male portion of the population could be seen squatting beneath tall grass shelters, tightening the skins stretched across the tops of the big drums, and with weird but mellow pipings tuning up the reed flutes.

But displaying more energy than all the rest put together were Piga and Weupi. To these two, a group of women seated on the ground skinning bananas, monkey nuts and tapioca roots, were a special attraction. Not only had the pair eaten enough to satisfy several men, but they insisted time and again upon scattering the carefully piled heaps of food in their greedy search for the biggest and ripest mouthfuls, and the two little pouches on either side of Weupi's cheeks bulged to their utmost with the amount of nuts stowed into them.

To frustrate this inimitable pair the women had perforce to place themselves shoulder to shoulder in a tight circle, and this at last effectually put an end to their further attempts.

Not for long however was this ever energetic gorilla unoccupied. His keen eyes quickly lighted on a small heap of something lying in the sunshine; carefully raising the banana leaf with which it was covered, he there saw lying side by side on a piece

of bark cloth two tiny brown-skinned twin babies, only a few days old. His love for all small helpless creatures at once rose to the surface, and stretching out a broad, hard-skinned paw, he tried to pick up one of the little mites, but it eluded his grasp and with a loud wail fell back again. On hearing the cry the young mother, busy in her hut close by, dashed out and was horrified to see Piga's squat black figure leaning over her precious infants, with a look of puzzled perplexity in his little twinkling eyes. By his squat powerful body and ugly old-man-like face she judged him to be a ferocious brute. How was she to know that in his heart he carried a soft spot for all tiny helpless creatures ? Mother-like, she determined to defend her offspring against him or die in the attempt, so back into the hut she dived and snatched up a burning log from the fire over which she had been cooking. Thus armed, she again emerged and with all her force dealt Piga a heavy blow on the head, whilst from the end of the fire-stick a shower of sparks rained across his shoulders. The blow itself he barely felt, for his skull was well protected by its deep crest of bone ; but the smell of the singeing hair terrified him, so turning, he fled, leaving the woman gaping in astonishment.

It so happened that Yidahonga, seated in the cool shade and, to pass the time, endeavouring to learn how to play a little silver-toned musical instrument, found this knocked clean out of his hands as the terrified Piga landed full in his arms with a mighty bump. Fearing that perhaps the ape had been wounded, he carefully examined the

PIGA AND THE TWINS.

Facing p. 114.

hairy body, but not finding even a scratch, he rightly concluded that Piga was only frightened.

During the whole day the happy bustle of preparation continued, and even the noon-day siesta was forgotten.

Towards sundown however Seramani emerged from out of his hut clad in a long ceremonial cloak of skins, dyed scarlet and stamped all over with an elaborate design. His headmen too were similarly clad, but their cloaks were black and less striking both in workmanship and pattern.

Naju and his henchman, in honour of the festive occasion, cast aside their heavy skin cloaks and donned others of finely woven raffia cloth of a beautiful purple colour, that had been made by the ladies of Dungundega's harem. From their right shoulder, clasping the robe together, hung,—one at the front and one at the back—long tassels of fine-combed fibre.

Two splendid specimens of manhood they looked as they stood leaning on gleaming copper spears in the midst of a group of warriors whose ebony bodies were gaily streaked with paint.

That his actions in slaying the man-eaters called for any special merit never for a moment dawned on Naju, and the secret of how they intended to honour him had been so well kept by Seramani's people that no hint of it had reached his ears. Therefore when the chief followed by his headman and the entire population marched across towards him, he paid no heed, taking it to be only the commencement of the festivities.

Even the two heavily carved ivory armlets that

Seramani carried in his hand told him nothing, for he was a stranger and so unacquainted with the customs of the tribe.

"During your stay amongst us," began Seramani, placing himself in front of Naju, "we have come to know that, like all the truly great, you are at heart a very simple man, shunning both reward or thanks for your brave deeds.

"As riches are counted, we are indeed only a very poor tribe and have nothing to offer you worthy of your acceptance, but we are nevertheless anxious to show you our deep and everlasting gratitude for the manner in which you have delivered us from the lions.

"There is only one way in which we can thank you, but fearing that you would either refuse or evade us, we have, up to now, kept the matter secret.

"It is well known that all the tribes throughout the land have their own method of rewarding bravery, some by riches, others by a position of great honour. Amongst our people however we have only one way, the bestowing of an ivory armlet to be worn above the elbow of the right arm. But, let me tell you, no ordinary deed of daring will win this much-coveted prize, which only the most powerful of the chiefs have the right to award. To gain one of these bangles a man must kill in single combat either an enemy or two lions, and even when won, this armlet can only be worn on very rare occasions, such as the successful raiding of another tribe or the burial of a very big chief.

"I am now about to bestow on you and your no less brave comrade, this the highest honour of our tribe, and never during my lifetime has it been so worthily won or given with so much pleasure!"

As Seramani finished speaking, Naju, with a few simple words of thanks befitting his rank, held out his arm, and the old chief slipped the heavy bangle into its place, at the same time handing Yidahonga a second one, whilst the crowd around them burst into delighted cheering.

Many a long day had passed since such a feast as they now contemplated had been indulged in by Seramani's subjects; small wonder was it, then, that the people eagerly seated themselves in groups on the ground to enjoy the numerous good things prepared for them.

No sooner had the party of chiefs taken their places around the mats, ready spread for them, than the slaves carried in the big swans killed the day before. The fat bodies of the birds bulged with the quantity of crushed monkey nuts stuffed into them, as they lay surrounded with steaming piles of the tender hearts of young palms. Next came scores of round sweet loaves made from banana flower, and then water-lily roots swimming in a sauce of tapioca leaves, made rich with golden palm oil. Surely a feast fit for the gods themselves!

As soon as the people had finished their meal a procession was formed and, headed by the chiefs, made its way to the dancing-ground, where braziers of burning beeswax and resinous gum brightly lit up the scene. The dusky blue of the heavens

sparkled with myriads of stars, and long streaks of summer lightning played fitfully across it.

At once the drums, both big and little, struck up a lively measure, as the young unmarried women, their naked bodies gaily bedecked with feathery trails of sweet-scented herbs, swayed softly as they snaked around the group of chiefs seated in the centre of the ground.

Following on their heels came the men of the village, carrying in their uplifted hands curved and polished hunting-knives, and fastened into their wiry black hair big bunches of hawks' feathers. Their bodies and even their faces were smeared with the vivid cardinal dye of the camwood tree. At the end of this line the older women took their places, and the fact that many of these carried heavy babies strapped on to their backs mattered not the slightest; right merrily they stepped in time as gaily as the younger ones.

In this way a big circle was formed while the onlookers softly chanted a chorus, individual performers leaping into the ring to display their talents.

One brawny man, with the face of a gorilla, mimicked in truly lifelike manner the shambling gait and clumsy gestures of that greatly feared animal, ending his performance by banging his chest and roaring loudly.

Two old grandmothers, gaily bedecked with leaves and wearing in their upper lips large round ivory discs, next stepped into the centre. Jealousy was the theme they sought to portray as round and round each other they pranced, and the know-

ledge that both had partaken much too freely of beer and were very likely to slip and really stab each other with the knives they brandished added not a little to the enjoyment of their delighted audience.

The night was fresh and cool, but their frenzied movements soon brought the perspiration pouring from the bodies of the dancers, and frequent visits were paid to the pots of beer standing ready, while little thirsty children bickered and fought over the layer of thick fermented grain left at the bottom of the vessels.

Since first the man-eaters had commenced their raids these poor stricken people had forgotten that such a thing as dancing existed in the world, for between mourning for their dead and the wearing anxiety as to whom might be the next victim, no thought had been given to this well-loved amusement.

No wonder therefore that the moon went down and the dawn broke to see many of the dancers still stepping briskly, although, be it said, the pace had now become considerably slower owing to all the musicians but two having fallen asleep over their drums.

In place of the usual tobacco, little rolled pellets of "daha" had been smoked by the chiefs. Naju and Yidahonga, unused to this potent drug, had long since retired into their hut, there to live in a dream world of their own until such time as the effect had worn away.

Seramani too having indulged much too freely in both the beer and the daha, had likewise early

in the proceedings become oblivious to the whole world, and been carried back to his own hut by waiting slaves. Naju's following, fatally deceived as to the potency of the beer by its soft creamy flavour, quickly drained the share allotted to them, and then were greatly astonished when, instead of being able to dance the whole night through, as was their wont, they found after a very short time that their legs no longer seemed to belong to the rest of their body and they were unable to stand, let alone dance, and later were to be seen making their way back to the village, many of them, be it said, on their hands and knees.

Others, too helpless to move, simply lay down on mother earth and sank to sleep where they lay, until the morning sun awoke them to the realisation of an abnormal thirst. Water, water, was then the cry, so springing to their feet, away they rushed to the little stream that supplied the village, and sitting down in the middle, allowed the cool liquid to flow over their throbbing heads, then, cutting pieces of stem from a near-by soap tree, scoured their big strong teeth to a glistening whiteness.

Thus refreshed, and feeling again in their right minds, thoughts of a morning meal occurred to them, so, dripping wet as they were, they scuttled gaily back up the path to the village.

Here in that every-day meeting-place, beneath the fig tree, they found their Prince and his comrade, with a sad-faced Seramani confronting him, in the middle of a circle of down-hearted warriors; for they had just heard that their guest and his following were leaving that same day.

"There is no further reason why we should dawdle here," said Naju, "now that the man-eaters are slain. Unless I am very much mistaken, should trouble of the same kind arise in the future, this band of warriors, who have during the last few days proved themselves such brave and capable hunters, will be more than able to deal with it.

"And I, never having seen such a thing, am now very eager to reach the big lake that you tell me is a full six days' march from here."

When at last they set off after a busy morning of bustle and preparation, the whole village to a man turned out to see the start, and it was a noisy, babbling crowd who accompanied them down the path.

At the very head of the procession went Piga, and out from amongst his long coarse hair peeped the small face and bright brown eyes of the little white monkey Weupi.

In one hand the gorilla grasped a thick piece of sugar-cane, a delicacy of which he was more than fond, and as he ambled along, with his strong pointed teeth he tore off the thick outer covering and with a loud sucking noise chewed the soft sugary pith within.

All too soon for the grateful villagers, the time came to say farewell, and there followed a great to-do of shaking hands, and good wishes heartily offered.

Naju, standing on an ant-heap, after all had left him, to take a final look at the collection of tiny grey dwellings nestling around the giant fig tree,

is to be forgiven if the thought passed through his head that, young though he was, it was due to him and to him alone that the chattering crowd of people filing in a string up the path were able once more to take up again their old care-free existence.

CHAPTER VII

The Leopard's Prey and a Rebel Chief

Before leaving on their long journey, Seramani had insisted upon loading up Naju and his men with plenty of foodstuffs for the road; this, as it turned out, was very fortunate, for on reaching the lake region they found the people there, instead of living in the usual big villages, scattered about in small families. Many of them even having taken up their residence in the small dead craters that were to be found clustering around the vast volcanoes whose heads towered away into the very clouds.

The people they were now amongst turned out to be a truly handsome race, both kind and courteous, but at the same time lazy and dirty.

Their ruler, a chieftainess named Mulizi, lived in a big village on the lake shore, but in this far-distant corner of her country she was little more than a name to her subjects, for only a very few of them had ever seen her.

The whole region was crossed and recrossed by well-worn tracks along which it was easy to march from dawn to dusk, stopping only for a rest and a meal in the middle of the day.

But a serious drawback, which Naju's men now

encountered for the first time in their lives, was a total lack of fuel. The most careful searching on the part of the bearers only produced sufficient dry shrubs or reeds with which to cook the evening meal; never a scrap remained over for the big bright fires around which they loved to sleep. This was all the more unfortunate in that the flaming sunshine made the days warm enough, but the nights at this high altitude were bitterly cold.

Naju and his following were therefore very glad each night to take shelter in one or other of the crater homesteads, where the people lived so contentedly amongst their flocks and herds.

Most of the families had lived in the same spot for generations and were both too happy-go-lucky and too careless to find new ground on which to plant their crops. The result was that they grew barely sufficient food for their own use, and although willing to share what they had with the strangers, who had seemingly dropped from out of the skies, the few bowls of beans or sweet potatoes they were able to sell did not go far towards satisfying the over-hungry bearers. Then it was they had good reason to feel thankful for Seramani's forethought.

Most of the homesteads at which they slept consisted only of three or four small round huts, often built in the centre of a banana grove. A lot of ingenuity was therefore required for this large party to find a place in which to curl up for the night, but as it was always cosy and warm inside the huts, nobody minded a little overcrowding,

least of all the goats and sheep, who every night slept in the dwellings of their owners. The strong hairy smell of these pampered animals, the reek of crowding humanity and the pungent smoke from the reed fires, for which there was no outlet, they minded not at all.

After one exceptionally long and tiring day they considered themselves indeed fortunate when, just as the sun went down, they came to a newly deserted homestead with four good huts still standing. Babbling happily as they wrenched the poles from the roof of the most dilapidated hut, they lit bright fires in the other three, and waiting only to cook and eat a much-needed meal, turned into the smoky interiors and were quickly fast asleep. Night settled quickly down; not even a hyæna howled or a jackal barked, only the cicadas kept up their piercing monotonous din and the heavy leaves of the banana palms rattled and banged softly. Just as the first grey streaks of dawn broke however this peace was quickly changed to clamour, for inside the huts arose angry shouting, interrupted by the sound of loud-ringing slaps on naked bodies. First the door of the hut in which Naju and Yidahonga slept was flung violently open, and out they both tumbled pell-mell, while close on their heels bounded Piga and Weupi. The doors of the other huts were also flung wide, pouring forth a string of very angry men.

The scene that followed might no doubt have been very amusing to an onlooker; it was however anything but that to the unlucky participators. Naked black bodies, shivering with the sudden

change into the cold morning air, danced frenziedly about, uttering angry exclamations and stamping violently on the ground as they plucked out numberless black and brown ants whose cruel mandibles were so firmly embedded in their skins and the cause of all the trouble. Only after many scores of these venomous little insects had been crushed between angry fingers was any thought given to the various belongings left in the huts. But one peep in at the doors showed the futility of trying to rescue a single article, for by this time the floors and walls were so covered with the marauders that they presented one unbroken curtain of ever-moving black.

Knowing from past experience that neither fire nor water would serve to drive these fearless members of the ant tribe away, until of their own free will they chose to go, there only remained to wait as patiently as circumstances would allow. So willing hands quickly pulled the remaining poles from the broken roof and fires were soon crackling merrily on a patch of ground well away from the ant-infested huts.

Several hours passed, and they watched the sun rise in all its scarlet splendour and climb slowly up the heavens, disappearing as it mounted the thick curtain of mist that each night draped the great volcanoes that they were now leaving behind. Eager then to be again on the march, they essayed a second attempt to retrieve their belongings. Several of the bearers, now stepping cautiously, advanced to look, when lo and behold, not a single ant remained to be seen, although the scattered

wings of cockroaches and moths, whose bodies had been eaten up, testified to the war that had been waged. The dead bodies of many rats proved that even these wary little pests had for once been caught unawares, probably asleep in their nests in the grass roof.

Like thieves in the night, just as suddenly and silently had the army of ants come and gone. Narrow burrows leading away into the thick undergrowth, growing around the cleared patch on which the huts stood, were the only remaining signs left to show whence and whither the marauding pests had entered and left, marshalled into straight orderly columns, as it might be, by an ant general in command of an ant army.

The different loads were hurriedly tied up, and the company again proceeded on its way, fortunately none the worse for their disturbing experience with those vicious pests, which, as is well known, cause so much destruction amongst the flocks and herds, killing sheep and goats and sometimes even the cattle as well, by crawling into their noses and ears.

Nearing the big lake the country became even more mountainous, until it really seemed they must reach the very heavens themselves. The bearers with the heavy loads balanced on their heads could now only climb very, very slowly, and often only saved themselves from falling backwards by digging their long staves deeply into the ground. Going down on the other side of the hills was quite a different matter however and they slid and scrambled, raising clouds of fine black dust.

It was during one such descent that they met three old dames on their way to visit another village. They were standing in the long grass by the side of the track to allow the men to pass. On their heads each of them balanced a basket, which, sad to relate, instantly aroused the cupidity of the greedy bearers, causing them to throw down their loads and plead for "just one pinch of tobacco." The eldest of the trio, gazing at the circle of faces surrounding her, with an expression of bland innocence on her wrinkled old countenance replied "that if she had any tobacco such handsome strangers should have it without asking, but unfortunately the crops had been poor that year and at this very moment, together with her companions, she was on her way to borrow some from a neighbour until the new crops were ripe. It was unfortunate for the old grandmother that at this moment she moved slightly forward to emphasize her remarks, revealing as she did so, in the long grass behind where she had hidden it on hearing the approach of strangers, a fat bundle of beautiful golden tobacco with yet two smaller bundles of a similar kind belonging to the other women.

It is to be feared that the intended recipient of these gifts, probably the chief of a nearby village, was to be disappointed, for with loud shouts of mirth the bearers swooped down on their prize and greedily tearing the bundles apart, shared the tobacco forthwith amongst themselves. Then with pipes aglow once more they passed across the hills without even another thought to the poor old

women whose husbands no doubt rated them soundly for not having hidden the tobacco more carefully.

Not long after this they passed a group of youths who also stood aside to watch them pass. Leaning on their long staffs, they gaily responded to the many greetings flung at them, showing rows of handsome teeth as they smiled broadly. On being asked by Naju what they were doing in so isolated a spot, they replied: "We are hunting some small antelopes of which there are many on the sides of these mountains." Knowing of no reason to doubt them, Naju's party proceeded on their way to the very top of the range, and then sat down for a well-earned rest.

Lying and lolling about on the soft thick grass, lazily their eyes roamed over the magnificent scenery around, but rested presently on a sight that made them all sit quickly upright, for, feeding in a hollow just below them, but well hidden from chance passers-by along the track, were a fine herd of fat cattle. This, then, was the real reason for the presence of the men they had passed, not the hunting of buck as they had said! To whom could the cattle belong? If all was as it should be, why had they hidden the herd and then deliberately lied about them?

Here was something that needed looking into! Off they started therefore and being very angry at the way they had been duped, the bearers with loud shouts went speeding down the hill again. As they turned the corner, around which the cattle were placidly feeding, the lying herdsmen,

considering discretion the better part of valour, were to be seen sprinting for their lives up the far side of the valley.

Now here was a heaven-sent opportunity not to be missed! Two of the very fattest and sleekest steers were at once selected and surrounded by the now elated bearers. Hunting-knives glinted in the sunlight, and in less time than it takes to tell the two beasts lay dead on the sward. Quickly were the hides ripped off and the fat juicy meat sliced from the bones, each man binding his share in fresh green leaves. Cheerfully shouldering the gory bundles, the whole party were soon trooping triumphantly back to where their young Prince and Yidahonga had laughingly watched the whole proceedings.

Perfectly happy in the thought of the feast of meat awaiting them at the end of their journey, once more they shouldered their loads, and singing happily, resumed the march.

As they climbed higher and higher the clouds descended like fine rain, chilling their naked bodies through and through. At last however as all things have an end—even a long and arduous journey—they were splendidly rewarded for their hardihood, for on rounding the slope of the last mighty mountain there stretched out below them the vast lake, surging and swelling, blue-green into the far horizon. Never in their lives had they dreamt of such a wonderful sight. One and all they halted and sat down to gaze their fill. Naju himself, accustomed only to the small mountain streams of his own country, was enchanted, and moved

away from the rest of the chattering crowd to wonder over each separate detail.

The bearers meanwhile perched themselves on the very edge of the escarpment, from which precarious position they gave vent to their overcharged feelings with gutteral "Ya-bahs" and "Ah-yahs" in truly savage fashion. Theirs, be it said, though, was a more material appreciation of the wonders before them, for had not Seramani's people told them tales of the huge fish, often caught by the wild fisherfolk living on the lake shores, and how delicious they were to eat, these same fish, and some of them so big that it took two strong men to lift them! They had also heard of a big animal of which great numbers were to be found in the water. So it was not to be wondered at that the mouths of these lusty men watered as they pictured the mountain of fat flesh just one of these great sea-horses would yield! Thus, each man happily following his own line of thought, they sat contentedly on, forgetful of the swiftly fleeing hours. until the sun, already low down in the sky, warned them that they must continue their downward climb if they were to reach a village before nightfall.

The men were very weary and already somewhat subdued after their first wild burst of excitement at sight of the lake. Solemn mountain peaks stood darkly against the sky, majestic mountains towered around them, and when suddenly the sun disappeared behind a bank of dark clouds, their feelings sank accordingly. They were nearing the end of their day's march, but instead of singing

gladly as was their wont, they plodded along silently on this occasion. Thus it was they heard, floating up to them from somewhere below, the loud wailing cry of the death-song. Borne upwards by the breeze, the mountains caught the sound, echoing it backwards and forwards until the air was filled with its sadness, compelling the listeners to pause a moment in wonder as to its cause.

So far they had seen no sign of a habitation, but as they descended a deep valley a large village came into view, from which the sounds of wailing still continued. When presently they reached its outskirts, contrary to the usual custom, not a soul came to offer them greeting. But of this they took no notice, for even in their own country all other events are disregarded during a time of mourning.

No matter what the rank of the dead person may be, all work ceases, private feuds are forgotten and the people foregather, the men in one hut and the women in another. With them, it is the duty of the family of the dead to brew, and distribute free, many pots of beer. Should they fail in this duty, and should the wailing not continue for three days and three nights after the death, then the newly released spirit, becoming ashamed, refuses to enter the world of the dead and instead becomes evil and wanders restlessly around its former haunts, dealing death and disease. Such is their strange belief. Sometimes it is the newly-born babies who suffer, as, stricken by an unknown sickness, one after another they die. Or it may be the chief who is called upon to pay the penalty for any neglect on this score; he may die himself

or may suffer in other ways, such as his wives becoming barren.

But the most dreaded of all the curses that can be caused by an evil spirit is that of drought, for then the crops fail and the people die in their thousands of starvation. These superstitions have held sway almost since time began and since first the God of Creation peopled the Southern lands with their dusky hordes. No wonder is it then, that to ward off such terrible evils the people throw themselves heart and soul into their wailing and drinking and so appease the restless spirits.

As at these times too very little food, if any, is eaten, the strong fumes of the beer served out mount unchecked to the brain, driving the mourners to such a state of frenzied madness that all sense of fatigue and humanity is forgotten. Night and day the wailing continues, sometimes dying away to a low murmur, but breaking forth again as some newcomer joins the seated throng. So unspeakably sad and heartrending is this wailing sing-song that strangers who have never even set eyes on the dead person will stand and listen with the tears streaming down their faces.

Many of the big, simple-hearted men in Naju's following felt this effect as, having laid down their loads, they stood to watch with curious eyes the extraordinary preparations in progress for the burial, whilst all around them sobbed the death-song. Naju in the meantime approached a man who, like themselves, was only a looker-on, and from him learnt of the sad tragedy that had been enacted.

The victim of the tragedy was a woman, one of the younger wives of the chief, the cause of it a big hill leopard. We may suppose this treacherous beast as leaving his well-hidden lair in a dark ravine, silently and sinuously worming his spotted body down through the thick foliage and coming at last to the village itself. He couldn't have said why, but in his cunning cat mind he knew that the still dark hour before the dawn was the best for his fell purpose, whilst in the huts around him men, women and children lay wrapped in peaceful slumber. In this case, though, the leopard was not altogether to blame, for the custom decreeing that each wife of a chief must live alone in a separate hut had something to do with it. How fatally easy had the leopard found it to break down the frail insecurely-fastened reed door, then with one blow of his cruel claws strike the life out of a sleeping woman. There was left no strong man's arm behind a sharp spear to frustrate his evil deed, so, as he had slain the mother, now he slew her two little newly-born twins asleep beside her. His love of slaughter and his rapacious appetite both satiated, he crept away back to his lair, there to sleep through the sunlit hours until the night came round again, bringing the darkness so suited to his evil purposes and stealthy, cunning nature.

So silently had all this happened that not even a tiny cry had warned the sleeping villagers of what was taking place in their very midst. Only when another woman entering the hut at daylight and uttering a loud shriek and running wildly from the terrible and unexpected sight that confronted

THE LEOPARD'S PREY.

Facing p. 134

her, was the truth known. The tiny dead babies now lay by the side of what remained of their mother's body, while the elaborate preparations for the burial were carried out and incidentally watched with such great interest by Naju and his following.

First into the village was driven a mighty ox whose throat was slit with one blow. The heavy head with its branching horns was left untouched, but the skin stripped from the body and spread on the ground. Into this were placed the sad remains of the little family and the whole bound into a bundle, was slung on two stout bamboo poles with leather thongs. Sixteen stalwart men, who had all this time stood ready waiting, now hoisted it up to their shoulders, and without uttering a word set off at a quick trot to the chief's private burial ground. Chanting and crying behind came the village women, carrying big bowls of snow-white maize flour which they scattered to the four winds of heaven to bring prosperity to the spirit of the dead woman in the world to which it had gone. Last of all came the chief himself, a tall commanding figure, wearing around his eyes and mouth painted circles of white clay, telling of his bereavement. With him walked the village headmen, each carrying something of the dead woman's most prized possessions to be laid in her grave. God help the thief who would so much as dare to lay a finger on even the very smallest of these articles, for if found out no mercy would be shown to him; only death, or torture worse than death, would be his portion.

The whole of the inhabitants, from the tiniest toddler to the oldest and most decrepit, had joined the procession, and when the cavalcade had passed from sight and sound down a deep ravine, Naju's men for the first time gave a thought to their own needs, which were by this time of a very pressing nature indeed. First they desired some empty huts in which to sleep, and then the very biggest vessels they could find in which to cook their precious meat. They were by this time however very capable of fending for themselves, so into the deserted dwellings they dived, emerging again with bundles of dry firewood, and in a very short space of time the big pots were bubbling loudly, filling the air with their savoury smell.

It was long after dusk had fallen that the people returned from their sad mission. Striding at their head came the chief himself. As he advanced quickly towards them Naju at the same time rose to meet him, and the two gazed at each other with undisguised interest. The great Mutuzi chiefs who, many generations ago, had come down from the Nile and, first conquering the untamed savage tribes of the Ruanda, had installed themselves as rulers, were famed throughout the country. Tales of their prowess, their great height and physical beauty, so different from any of the other tribes, had spread throughout the land, even to this far-distant corner. Although he had never set eyes on one of these famous people, there was not the shadow of a doubt in the mind of M'seo the Chief that this tall, slim, handsome youth who

stood before him, could be any other save a Mutuzi of the royal clan.

When first Naju had entered the village, M'seo had longed to bid him a hearty welcome, but until he had buried his wife the customs of his tribe forbade that he should do any such thing. However by the cordial warmth of his greeting he now sought to atone for the delay. Together with all his headmen, he flung himself on to the ground, and while lying flat on his back sharply clapped his hands three times as a sign of submission and homage. "I, M'seo, chief of this humble village," he said, "heartily bid you welcome. It distresses me that owing to the sad event of which no doubt you have already heard I was unable to greet you on your arrival, but nevertheless together with your great following, you are indeed welcome. I know not from whence you come, but that your purpose is a peaceful one I feel very certain."

"Yes," Naju replied, "that is so. I am a son of Dungundega, King of the Ruanda, and am merely passing through your village on my way to the big lake that lies beyond. This," pointing to where Yidahonga stood listening, "is my guide, philosopher and friend."

At this moment, and before M'seo had time to make any further reply, his eyes lighted for the first time on the redoubtable Piga emerging from one of the huts, grasping with both hands the half of a steaming pumpkin that he had discovered cooking, while close at heel followed his little white friend Weupi. Just for a moment an expression

of fear flitted across the chief's face, and his headmen turned like one man and vanished ignominiously into the nearest huts. Although this was not consistent with their former attitude of dignified silence, still it was perhaps to be understood, for never before had they seen such a strange beast, and so closely resembling a man. Eyes wide with fear and wonder gazed at the stolid Piga from every doorpost. Not one glance to right or left however did the ape deign to bestow, but squatting on his haunches by the side of his owners, he was soon engrossed with his lucky find. Seeing that their chief had stood his ground and suffered no harm, the people soon regained their confidence, and leaving the shelter of their huts, came and stood around in groups to gaze at this strange animal and his interesting companions.

By this time the tempting smell of cooking meat pervaded Naju's camp and soon drew the attention of the villagers. Even M'seo himself, try how he might, could not resist an occasional glance in the direction of the steaming pots. This was not lost upon Naju, and, eager as he was to learn all he could about the part of the country they had now reached, he cordially invited M'seo, as well as his headmen, to the coveted feast. Nothing loth, the chief consented, but he was not the man to allow himself to be outdone in the way of generosity. Calling his people together, he ordered them to cook and prepare all the foodstuffs that had been brought from the garden that day, and so to the piles and piles of meat provided by Naju's men were added huge yellow pumpkins steamed in their

skin, thereby retaining their nut-like flavour. Whole baskets of floury sweet potatoes were another addition, and pot after pot of fat green beans. But best of all were the huge overflowing gourds of frothing milk, warm from the cows.

Although perhaps the way it was served was not all that could be desired, still for all that the famished men of Naju's following agreed that it was as fine a meal as they had ever eaten. As the monkey-nut crop had just been harvested, heaping baskets of these well-loved delicacies were also placed before the guests, and as soon as the meal was ended handfuls of the kernels were flung into the glowing fires, where they toasted and crackled fragrantly, afterwards being shelled and crunched with gusto.

It is sad to relate that the chief's grief at the loss of his wife did not in any way interfere with his zest for food; perhaps the fact that fifty-nine others were left comforted him. At any rate, as the whole company sat or lolled around the bright fires, cheered by the jovial companionship and plentiful fare, he waxed both merry and talkative. He told them, amongst other things, of a rebel chief who for many years had lived hidden in the mountains, and was only seen or heard of very occasionally, when, with his company of vagabonds —the criminals and wrongdoers from all over the country—he would swoop down on the surrounding villages, carry off whole herds of the fattest cattle, and with them again disappear into the most inaccessible regions.

It pleased M'seo enormously to hear how and

where Naju's men had obtained the meat they had just eaten. Said he: "There is not a chief for many days around owning such a fine herd of cattle as that you tell me about; there is therefore no doubt that they belong to this same rebel chief of which I have told you. Although I myself would gladly go to try and kill or capture him, the men of my village refuse to follow me, for they fear his wrath should we not succeed. I certainly realise that in his revenge he would kill my men, burn down the village and carry off all the women and children; but nevertheless I for my part would risk all these things, for from my father did he not steal many head of cattle that should at his death have belonged to me. Now," continued M'seo, rising excitedly to his feet and glancing around at the eager faces of the men as they carefully followed every word of his story, "listen to me, for into my head this instant has come a plan whereby the country can be rid once and for all of this cattle thief. You," he said, turning to Naju, "are a brave and fearless Prince searching for adventure, and I would that amongst my puny subjects"—here he glanced contemptuously at his headmen—"there were even a few such men as the slaves of your following. Alas however there are not, but knowing as I do every winding path and secret pass in these great mountains, let me suggest that if at early dawn to-morrow morning you will call your men together I will lead you to the very threshold of this rebel's dwelling. So quickly could we arrive there by a path I know that he would neither have time to escape nor

prepare to defend himself. Although both cruel and cunning, he is by this time a very old man; then think how easy would it be for you to attack and kill both him and his confederates. After taking your fair share of the vast herds of cattle he has accumulated, should you consider it well to give the rest to me, then my gratitude would have no bounds, for should I not be compensated for those he stole from my father? Do not answer at once, but think well over what I have suggested," finished M'seo.

Had it been left to the bearers, in their heedless, careless way they would have agreed instantly, for already in their minds they were experiencing the delicious thrills and excitement of the actual combat, not to mention the added joy of handling the vast herds of cattle, for they were in no doubt as to the result of the attack. The final decision however rested with their Prince, and although he himself would have enjoyed the adventure equally as much, if not more, than any of the others, he reasoned to himself that the victory would scarcely be worth the trouble and risk that would have to be taken. In the first place, of what use to him would the cattle be? It was very certain he could not take them with him, so it would simply mean that all and not a portion of them would have to be given to M'seo. Then another reason occurred to him—some at least of his followers would be slain, and was it worth while that Dungundega should in this way lose many of his best and most valuable slaves? No, decidedly it was not. Moreover it would mean a considerable delay, and he

was now most anxious to reach the lake, still a good day's march away. Turning to M'seo therefore he shook his head. "After your kindness to us," he said, "I would that it was possible for me to agree to embark with you on this adventure, but after considering the question well I do not think it would be worth my while; do not therefore let us trouble further about the matter."

Thus perforce nothing more was left to be said, for in spite of M'seo's deep disappointment, who was he, a humble chief, to dispute the word of this princely visitor? As to the bearers, their master's wish was law, and never would they even dream of going counter to it, and so the matter passed out of their minds, being replaced by the anticipation of a dance, heralded by someone throwing bundles of dry reeds on to the fires which, flaring brightly, lit up the scene. Next a youth brought out a drum and on it struck a few rattling notes. This was more than the younger members of Naju's following could resist, so up they sprang and, together with the village youths, soon formed themselves into a merry circle.

First they sang a chorus, beating time with clapping hands, until other and bigger drums were brought. There were no hard and fast rules; each individual danced for the love of the rhythm and his own pleasure. Yelling loudly, the youths one by one leapt into the circle, only to be caught around the waists by the waiting maidens, and then two at a time dance round and round together. This little manœuvre never failed to delight the audience; but others of the dancers were too

timid to be thus publicly embraced, and so by leaping high into the air deftly avoided the waiting arms. Around the fires the elder members of the party squatted contentedly, sucking their pipes and watching the revels, and in this joyous fashion ended yet another happy day.

CHAPTER VIII

Mulizi the Chieftainess

Dawn the following morning beheld Naju and his men filing in a long string out of the village.

With them for a short distance went M'seo and some of his people, bound for a small forest-clad mountain, there to cut down and carry home with them some strong poles and lianas, for the trackers, Amani and Amisi, had shown M'seo's people how to build a strong and cunning trap with these materials to catch that despoiler of their village, the great spotted leopard.

Right down to the edge of the lake the grass-clad mountains continued; but here the country was more thickly populated, and numerous quaint little villages and homesteads clung precariously to the most inaccessible places on the mountain-side. The steep slopes of some of the mountains themselves were terraced with gardens, where the bright yellow of the ripe bean plants showed in sharp contrast against the fresh green trailers of the sweet potatoes and their shy mauve convolvulus flowers.

Up the sides of the ravines, down which trickled little cold streams, tall banana palms swayed softly; for once planted in the rich black soil they thrived

and spread amazingly, even to the very tops of the mountains themselves.

In many places the tall rank grass and mountain shrub had been fired in an attempt to drive away the cruel marauders who first preyed on the flocks and herds and, when these were finished, on the people themselves. Up the sides of the hills the fires had spread, leaving behind them fantastically shaped patches of brown shrivelled grass and foliage through which massive grey rocks glowed sullenly, as if in anger at the too sudden removal of their soft and leafy mantles.

It was veritably a wild spot. A fitting place of abode for both evil spirits and beasts of prey.

At last a village, the biggest our wanderers had yet seen, was spied perched on a high ridge. This they decided could be none other than the home of the great chieftainess Mulizi herself. It was however still some distance away, and lay overlooking the far side of a small bay.

Lower and lower they descended, until the level of the lake itself was reached, where the heat became more and more intense. Presently, on entering a narrow track that led through a steaming papyrus swamp, they perforce had to march very carefully; for although the tough stems of the papyrus had been cut and laid to form a path, still the sharp jagged ends left standing, viciously pierced the legs and ankles of the unwary.

Accustomed only to the crisp sparkling air of their own mountains, the hot and damp mists that rose from the stagnant swamp, together with the scorching sun overhead, quickly tired them all, and

soon the perspiration trickled and glistened on the naked bodies of the bearers. They were therefore very glad indeed when towards sundown they arrived at their destination.

In the very middle of the village stood a big hut with a large open space in front of it, and rightly taking this to be the dwelling of the chieftainess, they wended their way thither, and after placing the loads on the ground stood expectantly waiting for someone to greet them.

Towards them presently came the great chieftainess herself, but so astonished were both Naju and his following at the extraordinary appearance of this grotesque female, that each and all were scarcely able to reply to the greeting she proffered them. For although only of medium height, she was tremendously broad, and many rolls of fat literally hung about her neck, and from deep down in her throat her thick, man-like voice boomed forth a welcome. Her covering, what little there was of it, consisted only of a brown antelope skin slung from the shoulders, and her podgy arms and squat, thick legs were heavily weighted with thick copper bangles, whilst around her neck swung a rope of flat, round-shell ornaments.

She was accompanied by her only son, whose squat, broad features resembled her own, but here the resemblance ended; for even to a casual observer he lacked the cunning intelligence that beamed from his mother's glittering black eyes. Behind her clustered a medley of men and women, curious to feed their eyes on the strangers and try to find out who they were and from whence they had come.

It came as a shock to Naju to find that the far-famed Mulizi, of whom they had so often been told, was nothing more or less than a fat commonplace old woman. It was only natural, knowing the splendid type of men who ruled as chiefs in his own country, to have pictured in his mind's eye some wonderful woman worthy to grace the position she held as a ruler over thousands of subjects.

However here they were, and must needs make the best of a bad situation, for only from her could he obtain the necessary canoes to follow on his journey across the lake.

A very few words sufficed to tell her who they were. Mulizi then turned, and with much silent formality led the way to some dilapidated guest huts, where, after promising to send them all they could require for the night, she waddled away with the village rabble at her heels.

She soon returned however this time at the head of a string of female slaves carrying bundles of wood as well as food vessels on their heads. These latter brought a sparkle to the eyes of the hungry bearers, for it was only human to expect they would contain something out of the ordinary in the way of good things to eat. Oh, the shock of disappointment when it turned out they contained nothing more or less than a watery mess of cold boiled beans!

For this unworthy fare she had at least the grace to apologise. "The gardens around the village," she boomed forth, "are very old and the soil so poor that nothing but beans will grow there.

Had you thought to have warned me of your intended arrival, the slaves who look after my distant plantations would then have brought in other and better food. If however you will possess your souls in patience, to-morrow shall see all you desire. I would dearly love," she said to Naju "to present you with an ox for your own needs, but although during my father's life we owned mighty herds of cattle they all perished and died, some say through the bite of an innocent looking fly which spread death and disease amongst them. If however you will condescend to accept it I have brought you the fattest tailed sheep of all my flocks." Here a slave led forward an old ram, whose bold staring brown eyes and scarred forehead proclaimed him the victor of many a hard fought battle; with long black curly hair, horns curving over his eyes, and a tail as wide as the rest of his body with the tip trailing on the ground, he looked a very formidable adversary.

Now during all this time Mulizi had addressed herself only to Naju, but had anyone troubled to notice it they would have seen her little black beady eyes turn often to where the young Swahili stood by his side. They were all however too much engrossed in their own affairs to pay any attention, and he, the least vain of all men, never even saw the glances.

Noting that Mulizi as well as the rest of her court smelt strongly of beer, Naju decided that no good could be done by complaining just then; he was nevertheless very angry at the paltry treatment accorded to his men after their long day's

march, and promptly handed the ram over to them to slaughter and divide the meat amongst themselves.

The fact that all had hoped to taste some of the much prized fish now that they were actually on the shores of the lake added not a little to their disappointment over the beans, so when morning came, bringing a further supply of these now despised vegetables, the anger of the men reached boiling point. Naju, demanding to be told where he could obtain some of the coveted fish, was met with the reply that the villages of the fisherfolk were many hours distant, but that the chieftainess herself had sent a runner round by the land bidding her people bring in their canoes as well as many loads of fish.

With this they were obliged to possess their souls in patience and wait with the best grace they could muster. But on this occasion, as always, Satan found work for idle hands to do.

Although the slaves had perforce to content themselves with the boiled beans, this meagre fare did not by any means suit the young ape Piga, so down the village street he wended his way in search of something a little more to his taste. The very sight of his squat black figure and ambling gait driving the women and children pell-mell into their huts, exactly suiting his book, his roving eyes at first rested on a tall wooden mortar, which past experience had taught him usually contained something of an edible nature, if only a mere mouthful to be scraped off the sides.

Luck was with him this time! Reaching up his long arm he pulled the mortar over crash,

scattering on the ground the oily mess of half-pounded monkey nuts it contained. Ably assisted by the true and faithful Weupi, in less time than it takes to tell he had made a clean sweep of this little appetiser and was soon wandering off in search of more.

The next thing to take his fancy were some strips of red bark that, having been boiled in water, were placed outside to cool. Picking up one of these he first smelt and then carefully tasted it, then finding that he liked the sweet astringent flavour, he cleaned up all the pieces, drank the liquid, dropped the pot, smashing it, then again ambled on, heedless of the fact that some poor wretch maddened with toothache had searched for hours for this special bark wherewith to ease the pain.

Nothing further lay ready to hand, so off down the path to the garden Piga made his way, stopping only when he struck a small patch of sweet potatoes. Time being of no object he seated himself comfortably in the middle of the patch, and with the thumb and finger of his right hand dug up the long tubers. First rolling them on the leaves to clean off the soil, he popped them into his mouth two at a time, crunching loudly, meanwhile digging for more, and two little streams of white juice trickled out of the corners of his wide mouth.

Although not caring greatly for the prospect, but wishing to remain on good terms with their hostess, Naju and Yidahonga found themselves obliged to accept an invitation from Mulizi to join her for the morning meal. This finished, there struck up amongst the village men a lively palaver,

and to which they both stayed to listen. As it afterwards turned out, this was most unfortunate, for it left the rest of their followers free and with time hanging heavily on their hands.

From amongst these a few kindred spirits at last decided to venture forth on a visit to some of the outlying homesteads, where they thought it just possible they might be able to obtain some slight variation to their very limited food supply. With no definite plan in their heads they wandered lazily along a narrow footpath circling the tops of the hills until they found themselves overlooking a deep valley.

Whilst gazing around to discover where lay the most likely homestead for their purpose, their trained eyes lighted on a long string of people pouring down into the valley from the opposite side, each of them carrying a load.

"Where had they come from and with what were they laden?" was the question that flashed through the minds of the watchers. There would, they concluded, at least be no harm done in trying to find out, so like a crowd of rabbits they scurried over the ground to a clump of bushes and there lay down in the shadow to wait for the caravan to pass.

Very soon their patience was rewarded, and the first members of the column drawing near it was seen that they were carrying heaping baskets of flour; then followed load after load of smoked dried fish, and women with heavy babies slung on their backs and big bunches of ripe bananas balanced on their heads. Six fat kids led on a string also passed by. Then,

last of all, struggling bravely along some distance behind the others came twenty men carrying on their backs vast, narrow necked gourds whose contents washed and banged noisily, filling the air with a ripe fruity smell. Like dogs with their noses on the trail, Naju's men breathed in this delicious aroma, for it was nothing more or less than the smell of banana beer!

To sympathise properly with the feelings of these men it must be kept in mind that their dinner the night before and their only meal that day had been boiled unsalted beans. So a little harmless curiosity to find out where all these delicacies were bound for was undoubtedly pardonable under the circumstances; thus, waiting only until the column had passed a little distance on its way, they up and followed silently.

Back along part of the path they had traversed only a short time ago they went, and then, turning suddenly, the way followed down a narrow, well-hidden track leading through a vast banana plantation. This to their astonishment brought them out at one end of the long, narrow street of Mulizi's village but, be it known, at the opposite end to where the guest huts were built.

Waiting and watching carefully until the heavy loads of foodstuff had vanished into several different huts, they turned and made back the way they had come. Once out of sight of the village, they took to their heels and ran as fast as their legs would carry them to tell the good news to their brethren, for, oh, happy thought, now they would at last get something decent to eat. Anticipation

ran high for the rest of the afternoon, and they waited with the very greatest impatience to see what the evening meal would bring forth.

Sundown coming again, they all watched with eager eyes the now well-known figure of the chieftainess waddling along at the head of the same column of female slaves who had brought them their food before. Down went the bundles of wood and the pots of water, then carefully placed in a row were the wooden bowls which should have contained the coveted luxuries but in which, alas, there lay only piles of multi-coloured boiled beans!

One glance into the bowls, and how bitter the disappointment, but not a word uttered one of the men, for their anger was too deep for mere words. But, and strangest fact of all, Mulizi herself seemed unaware of the waves of hatred surging around her. Picking up the bowls, they placed them in their sleeping-huts, and standing around, waited until the chieftainess had betaken herself back to the village.

The bearers and the cooks, together with their tiny assistants, one and all they squatted down in a wide circle and quietly but deliberately made their plans for the morrow.

Naju and Yidahonga were again away, which was a pity; for had either of them been on the spot they would at once have detected by the quiet air of mystery that some mischief was brewing. A little calm reasoning, and it might have been averted, and a lot of ill-feeling and no little bloodshed in the near future avoided. As it was, when

they returned from the village silence reigned in the camp, for the whole company lay stretched on the ground, either asleep or pretending to be, with little brisk fires dotted about between them.

A glimpse into the slaves' quarters the following morning would have revealed a pile of uneaten beans thrown into a corner; but no word of protest or complaint having been uttered, and taking it for granted that all was well, off down the street to join their new-found cronies went the two leaders, Naju and Yidahonga. Here was the very situation the bearers had hoped for, so arming themselves with their strong cudgels, and snatching up all the cooking-pots they could lay hands on, away they went to carry out the well-laid plans.

The only ones who did not join the excited throng were the two pygmies Amani and Amisi; these owl-eyed brown creatures understood quite well what was pending, but as the adventure failed to appeal to them it was none of their business, so down they sat in the sunshine contentedly sucking their long pipes.

Had Yidahonga possessed the slightest vanity in his nature he could not by this time have failed to notice the fact that the grotesque Mulizi felt for him a genuine admiration. The thought of anything so ridiculous however never even entered his head.

Both Naju and Yidahonga were each in his own way a revelation to this old chieftainess of what a really fine man could be like. Both were

young and each of them handsome in his own fashion.

Whilst appreciating to the full the slim, graceful body, finely chiselled features and soft dark eyes of Naju, Mulizi realised that this pure-blooded son of a King was not for her; but the powerful, muscular body of Yidahonga, his broad features, shaved head and wide mouth with its two filed teeth, appealed much more to her coarse animal nature. The little "fatty degeneration" she called "heart" throbbed at his mere presence in a way it had never done before, either for her late unlamented spouse or anyone else for that matter.

Wishing to impress Yidahonga therefore with what a really great chieftainess she was, she sent urgent messages to the slaves in charge of her plantations to double and treble the supply of foodstuffs sent in daily for her own use and that of the long string of relations and parasites that sponged on her.

These same parasites, be it said, to suit their own selfish ends, had so praised her personal beauty, lauded her great wisdom, magnified her possessions, in fact made such a complete fool of her that she had come to look upon herself as a truly wonderful woman.

She could have taken her choice of a husband from any of the men of her own tribe, but compared to her late spouse they were in her opinion a poor crowd, quite unworthy to fill the position marriage with her would raise them to.

Moreover a certain and largely increasing portion

of her subjects were always in rebellion, refusing to pay tithe in the way of foodstuffs, sheep, goats or salt. She had several times raised an army to fight against these rebels, but all in vain, owing to the poor quality of the only leaders she was able to provide.

But here she judged that in Yidahonga was a man strong and fearless enough to lead her armies against the whole country if needs be, a man moreover whom she really and truly admired.

She chuckled with glee at the consternation it would arouse in her apathetic court if suddenly she presented them with a new ruler. There was nothing she wouldn't give to induce him to desert his post as friend and advisor to Naju and stay behind as her husband. The thought too of the violent jealousy such a young, brave husband would arouse in her female friends filled her with unholy joy.

Not for the life of her however could Mulizi think how this thing was to be brought about. Once let the parasites find out what she intended doing and they would oppose it by every means in their power, for would it not mean an end to the drunken indolent life they at present enjoyed ?

How dearly would she love to have singled out a few of the brighter spirits around and induced them to tell Yidahonga of what a truly wonderful country it was over which she ruled so wisely, of its teeming subjects and fabulous riches. Only the mind of a vain, idle old woman could have conceived so fantastic an idea. Her village, although large, was

as unpicturesque as it well could be, and it ran the whole length of the high ridge overlooking the lake near which it was built. The houses, small boat-shaped reed frames thatched with grass and a door at each end, were placed in lines on either side of the wide, windswept street.

The men of her tribe, cowardly lazy brutes, left the work of hoeing and planting to the women, and these poor slavish creatures, draped around with a collection of filthy skins that had been handed down from generation to generation until they hung in mere tatters, set out each morning, many of them with dull stolid babies slung on their backs, to patiently plant out the beans, on which they lived, and with nothing better to look forward to at the end of their day's toil than to return to their homes at sundown, and there light the wood fires in the centre of the dwellings, and cook the evening meal whilst their lazy husbands and famished children squatted around hungrily awaiting their share.

The arrival of this young Prince and his large retinue of slaves was a truly red-letter day and sent a wave of new life coursing through the male portion of the population. Old and young, as soon as the sun rose, they trooped out to the open space in front of Mulizi's hut. When prompted, the older men were able to tell many tales of combat with the denizens of the forest and fighting and raiding between the tribes.

On this eventful day Naju was seated in the middle of a large circle of men with Yidahonga close by. The only woman present was the chieftainess

Mulizi who, seated contentedly on her mat, listened to the conversation when it interested her and dozed unashamed when it didn't. Stretching away beneath them, glittering and blue, lay the lake, and around them the hills flooded with golden sunlight.

Towards mid-day however there came a rude awakening to this peaceful scene, for up the dusty, sunbaked street dashed a crowd of men, their bodies streaming with perspiration. Coming to a standstill in front of the seated circle, altogether and at the top of their voices they tried to tell their tale of woe, but the result was such an indescribable din that the listeners could gather no glimmering of sense from the babel of noise.

Then up rose Mulizi and angrily commanded them to be silent; but if they even heard what she said they failed to understand it, so snatching a thick cudgel from a nearby man, she landed loud thwacks on their naked bodies. "Now, ye pack of baboons," she boomed, "keep silent until I bid you speak." Next she singled out from their midst a tall old man who, it would appear, was a headman of sorts and distinguished as such by the fact that he wore around his loins an antelope-skin while the rest of them were naked. Him she commanded to tell her in as few words as possible what all this disturbance was about.

So scared was he at first at being thus thrust rudely into publicity that although his lips moved no sound came out of them; gaining confidence however he presently spoke in a quavering voice. "O great chieftainess," he began, "for the last

twenty years it has been my duty to see safely delivered to you from your far plantations the daily supply of foodstuffs, and never, never before have I failed in my duty until this most unhappy day. Taking my place at the head of the column of slaves carrying the food this morning, we marched along silently and undisturbed until we reached the floor of the big valley, which, as you know, is thickly wooded. No sooner had we passed in between the trees than there sprang out from amongst them a horde of the biggest and strongest ruffians ever seen. Throwing themselves at the head of the column, they belaboured us so soundly with thick sticks that my poor frightened wretches threw down their loads and scampered away into the woods. Their brethren at the rear, seeing what had happened, did likewise, leaving me alone and helpless. But of me the robbers took no attention, for whilst many of their number fought greedily over the gourds of beer the rest were occupied in tearing open the loads of food. It broke my heart to stand helplessly by and watch, but what could I do, alone and unarmed, against so many? At last, finding myself unnoticed, I crept after the runaways and by dint of threat and persuasion gathered them together and brought them here by a roundabout path."

Turning to the group of slaves cowering at the back of him, he sharply ordered several of them to step forward, and pointing to the cruel wheals across their bodies, said: "Here is proof, if any be needed, that what I have said is true." Mulizi, with the rest of the people, now sprang to their

feet to examine the wounds, but no one spoke, for here was too serious an offence to be spoken of lightly.

From end to end of this savage land is one rule and one rule only for rich and poor alike. To steal a man's wife or his cattle is as nothing compared to the theft of one banana or a head of maize from the gardens, the village bins, or from a traveller through the jungle. That is the unforgivable sin, punished when found out by mutilation or death. For how else are the unfenced and often far-away crops to be protected. Only the lowest scum, the rebels and outcasts even dream of breaking this unwritten law.

Naju, having had as yet no hint as to the feelings of his followers regarding their food supply, listened with interest to the man's story, but no suspicion entered his head as to whom the culprits might be. With Yidahonga however it was different. He had been born and brought up amongst slaves all his life, and what was more, carried some of their blood in his veins, so it was easy to be seen that he understood them better than Naju ever could. He had also inherited from his father the Arab brain with its quick suspicions, and thus it was that the thought at once flashed through his mind, as he listened to the slaves' story, that the bearers and the rest of Naju's following had perhaps been left rather too much to their own devices for the last two days. Simple and childlike as the bearers were in many ways, nevertheless given a leader with a plausible tongue and a fancied idea of their own wrongs, they would follow like a flock of sheep.

It occurred to Yidahonga at the same time that he ought to have inquired how the men were faring, but seeing all the good things brought in each day, it had never crossed his mind that they were not receiving their full share. Not having yet gauged the mean character of the chieftainess, he saw no reason to doubt until now that the bearers at least were being well fed.

He mentioned nothing of his suspicions to Naju, but strolling away from the company as if nothing had happened, made his way back to the guest huts, where he found exactly what he expected, for sitting idly in the sunshine were Amani and Amisi, but of all the rest not a sign nor a sound. However he decided to wait, so ordering one of the pygmies to bring him a mat, he too sat down with his back against the wall.

Out of the assembled company he had just left only one pair of eyes had noticed Yidahonga's departure, those of the chieftainess herself.

Certainly never in Mulizi's lifetime before had a Prince of the Mutuzi passed through the country, but being the daughter of a chief as well as the widow of one, ignorance of the rules of hospitality could not be pleaded as an excuse for her careless and mean treatment of Naju's men. "If you would honour the master, do well by his slaves," was a proverb she had ignored, and in doing so had failed in her duty as the ruler of one of the biggest tribes in the land. And of this her guilty conscience now reminded her. Therefore when her headman and advisors gathered around to discuss what had best be done she roughly ordered them to mind their

own business. "The slaves that have been beaten," she said, "belong to me, and the food that is lost was also mine, so keep your tongues between your teeth until I command you to loosen them." Having subdued her people in this rough fashion, she waddled away into her hut, leaving them to talk in low, astonished murmurs amongst themselves.

In the meantime up the dusty street to the guest huts went Naju, and there finding Yidahonga seated in the shade, he too threw himself down on the same mat. It was evident from his manner that he still harboured no suspicions as to who the wrongdoers were, so in a few quiet words Yidahonga told him. "But if," said Naju, "this is the case, then one and all they must be punished, and severely too, for no matter how much to blame is this chieftainess in her treatment of them, still they must be taught that mine is the right to take revenge if need there be. They are wrong to have acted in this high-handed manner. Should news of this leak out to the tribes ahead, instead of a peaceful voyage of adventure we shall find ourselves embroiled in war."

"We may however be wrong in what we suspect and must on no account act hurriedly or unjustly. When they return the very first glimpse of their faces will tell us if we are right or not!"

Compared to the triumphant crowd of men who had that morning set out on what to them seemed a just retribution, it was indeed a sorry lot who towards sundown were seen making their way back to the guest huts.

Leading the way came the little cooks' assistants laden with the vessels in which the stolen food had been cooked. Then followed the cooks themselves, and after them again the weaker and smaller of the bearers, who had lost ignominiously in the battle for possession of the gourds of beer and so were able to march along with a steady gait and no tell-tale lurch. Bringing up the rear were the biggest and strongest of the men who had succeeded in getting hold of most of the beer and were therefore unable to march at all, their progress being a mixture of lurch and stagger. Occasionally overbalancing altogether, they were nevertheless determined not to be left behind, so proceeded on their hands and knees until able to pick themselves up again.

The effects of the beer and the excitement having now both worn off, the prospect of punishment began to loom darkly ahead. For of a certainty they would be punished, of that there was not the shadow of a doubt. What form that punishment would take was what now occupied their minds. Having done wrong, no thought of evading it however entered their simple heads.

Nearer and nearer they drew to the camp, and there catching sight of Naju seated with Yidahonga calmly awaiting their return, their spirits sank lower and lower. The very expression of guilty shame on their faces as they passed into the huts told its own tale to the watchers, but they gave no sign until the very last and most drunken of the men had staggered in.

The futility of ever finding out who the leaders

of this escapade were was known only too well both to Naju and Yidahonga, for many an evil slave escapes his just punishment through the unspoken brotherhood existing amongst them. Mulizi, the chieftainess, whose right it would have been in other circumstances, had forfeited all say in the matter; so Naju and Yidahonga arranged their plans, first however sending a messenger to Mulizi bidding her come with her following to judge of the punishment about to be administered.

One by one the names of the slaves were loudly called, and they emerged from the huts and Yidahonga formed them into a row, where they stood mute but resigned. No mention had been made of the form the punishment would take, but when Yidahonga let slip to the ground his long skin cloak, and calling to the pygmies, bade them "Bring out the whip of hippo hide," there was left no further room for doubt.

As he stood fingering the slender thong, waiting for the chieftainess to appear, the setting sun glinted on his splendid body, naked but for the strip of bark wound around his loins, showing the play of the muscles beneath the smooth black skin.

"Kalemba," he called, and the first of that long line of shamefaced slaves stepped forward and stretched himself on the ground face downwards. At first not so much as a groan broke from him as the first of the lashes descended, but as the vicious thong wound itself again and again around his body his iron control at last gave way, and he

THE PUNISHMENT.

Facing p. 164.

squealed like a wounded animal, and rolling over on to his side, pleaded for mercy. But of what avail when twenty stripes was the allotted number ? With two men holding his hands and two his feet, the flogging continued to the end, after which he rose from the ground and, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, passed whimpering into a nearby hut to hide his shame.

One by one the rest of the slaves were called forth to receive their just punishment. Some uttered no sound but lay like logs of wood beneath the lashes, others screamed, and some again sang loudly that they might not cry like a woman and be branded cowards for the rest of their lives.

The only woman there was the chieftainess, but across her broad squat features there passed not one flicker of pity. In her heart was room only for one feeling at a time, and as she watched the tireless rise and fall of Yidahonga's arm she was filled anew with admiration for the splendid brute strength of the man, and more determined than ever to win him as a husband, if not by fair means, well, some other way would have to be found !

Waiting until the last stroke had fallen, she rose, and approaching Naju, salaamed to the ground before him. "I am more than satisfied," was all she said before passing on her way back to the village.

At a later date however they were to find out that if as satisfied as she pretended to be, she at least had her own peculiar way of showing it !

As the calm follows the storm the peace of night descended on the company in the guest huts, for the slaves, knowing they had sinned against the laws of the country, meriting their punishment, bore in their hearts not one tinge of malice towards their masters.

Spreading their sleeping-mats on the ground and laying themselves down in whatever position the soreness of their bodies would allow, they were soon sleeping the sleep of the justly punished if not of the just themselves.

CHAPTER IX

A Mean Action Draws Forth a Red Revenge

Hot golden sunshine, water of the deepest, purest blue whipped into curving ripples by a soft warm breeze, and as a finishing touch to this perfect scene, a fleet of canoes sailing slowly around the shore of the lake.

Of what use the messenger sent by Mulizi to warn her guests of the fleet's arrival—to run himself out of breath when eager eyes had already spied the glad sight ?

A mad excited rush around after their scattered belongings and loud shouts for cord with which to tie them together, and then a noisy scamper down to the edge of the water to await the landing of the strange craft.

And strange craft they surely were on which the eyes of Naju and his following rested. Built of soft bark sewn together with plaited grass, the cracks roughly plastered with grey mud, they looked a most unseaworthy fleet. The owners of these cockle-shells, both men and women, stood upright to paddle them, balancing themselves easily and lightly.

So these were the wild fisherfolk of Mulizi's

tribe; but what a contrast, their slim athletic bodies, to the undersized paunchy crowd of rabble surrounding the chieftainess, who had herself come down to bid her guests farewell. Nothing could well be more simple than the lives these fisherfolk led. Dotted around the shores of this vast inland sea were the villages in which these people and their chiefs lived, but only very rarely did they visit Mulizi.

Taught to paddle a canoe at an age when the children of other lands are still being taught to walk, from that time forth the water becomes the only home they care about, and whole families at a time in one canoe spend the long hot days in fishing and cruising lazily about on the water. Each evening, as the sun sinks to rest, they land, light a fire, and having cooked their daily meal of fish, stretch themselves flat on the sand to sleep beneath the stars as do the animals.

These were the people too who refused point-blank to pay tithe or toll to Mulizi; but beyond burning down their useless villages, for which they cared not a jot, she was powerless otherwise to hurt them.

Whatever her feelings might be on that sore subject, here at least was neither the time nor the place to air them. Having nodded a reply to the greetings they proffered her, she stood aside alone, apparently watching her following taking from the canoes load upon load of smoked dried fish. But not with the fisherfolk and the gay, busy scene around were her thoughts occupied at this moment. Although she herself had summoned them, the

canoes had arrived unexpectedly soon, in fact much too soon to suit her purpose. She was still stubbornly determined to ask Yidahonga to stay behind as her husband; but how to make her wishes known to him without being overheard by her own people, that was the question troubling her as she stood on the sand.

As she debated this question within herself the gods were clearly on her side, for Naju suddenly stepped into the biggest of the canoes and seated himself there, thus leaving Yidahonga standing alone and well away out of hearing of the noisy crowd.

Any womanly modesty she might ever have been possessed of had been dissipated years ago by the copious draughts of banana beer she imbibed each day, and the flattering and spoiling she had received had only taught her to believe that any man who was lucky enough to possess her as a wife would indeed be fortunate.

Thus it was, bold and unashamed, she waddled through the deep loose sand to where the young Swahili stood and placed herself before him.

Wondering what she could have to say to him, Yidahonga gazed curiously down at her, as with her little muddy black eyes fixed admiringly on his face she spoke in her deep booming voice.

"I would," she began, "that amongst the men of my tribe I possessed a man as brave and handsome as you are, for then would I no longer rule alone. With you for my husband how gladly could I hand over these irksome reins of chieftainship. Instead of roaming through the land in this useless search for pleasure as the puppet of the young lord,

your friend and master, only think how much more desirable your position would be as my husband. Consider, too, the vast armies you could raise and yourself lead to victory—the flocks and herds and the numberless slaves that only await to be raided from the surrounding tribes. Think how quickly we should become the richest and most powerful tribe for many a long day's march. Can you find it in your heart to refuse such a golden opportunity ? If so, let me at least entreat you to ponder well before you do so."

Now as this mixture of swagger and greed flowed smoothly from Mulizi's lips, Yidahonga, unaware until this moment of the feelings she entertained for him, was amazed at this astounding proposal, and gazed helplessly at her. His next feeling was one of anger at the daring insolence of this ugly old woman; then the humour of the proposal dawned upon him, and throwing back his head, he roared with laughter.

He knew it not at that time, but learnt very shortly afterwards that the price demanded to be paid for that laugh was the life-blood of some of his comrades—lives that were precious for all that they were slaves, and of men too that he had known from the day of his birth. He learnt at the same time another lesson—that although you may be false to a woman, even lay hands on and strike her, still for all that you may not with impunity laugh at her.

Mulizi, in spite of her coarse body, manlike voice and overbearing demeanour, possessed all of a woman's vanity. Never had one of her own people

dared to laugh at her. When therefore Yidahonga gave way to his mirth her admiration for him surged up into a flood of hatred. Clenching her hands, she turned away lest he see the diabolical expression in her eyes. Oh, for a weapon with which to strike him to the earth! After a second however she became calmer, for were there not other weapons of revenge than a knife lying to her hand? . . . Without uttering another word she turned ponderously and to Yidahonga's astonishment waddled away.

Safe on land, it was a difficult thing indeed that overbalanced Naju's strong, agile-footed, mountain-bred slaves. But with the ways of a lightly built canoe they were still unacquainted; so when the first of them unheedingly stepped into one of those unstable craft, he straightway overbalanced and fell with a loud splash into the water. Loud shouts and roars of laughter greeted this mishap, making the next to essay the attempt proceed much more warily, and each one, after succeeding in stepping into the canoes, sat down promptly, regardless of the pools of cold muddy water washing around within them. Once safely down, they could barely be induced to move again, even to make room for their comrades.

After a heap of good-humoured shouting and chaffing at last were they all safely aboard, and the village men, stepping waist-high in the water, shoved off the heavily laden vessels.

The waving of hands and shouts of farewell sent pealing after them across the water were, it is to

be feared, ignored by all but the two leaders—the rest of the company being far too engrossed gripping the sides of the shell-like canoes and watching the green water as it slid past, and which to them seemed far too close.

How could they know that once they were out of sight around the first corner of the bay there sped out from the village one of Mulizi's messengers? Tall and lithe he was, and the most noted runner of the fat old queen's court. Hour after hour, along a little known and rarely used track, he raced tirelessly on until rounding the lake he came at last to a village on the opposite side. Here he sought out a certain chief and delivered to him the cruel message with which he was charged. This done, he turned and made back the way he had come.

In the meantime, all unconscious of the sword hanging over their heads, the company in the boats were beginning to realise that their present mode of travel was perhaps not so precarious as it had at first seemed.

As they glided smoothly through the warm sunshine the soft roll of the boats produced a lazy sleepy feeling, and the bearers felt far too comfortable even to cuff the little pot-bellied pot-washers who, already able to stand up, swaggeringly twitted their elders with the way they had behaved on first entering the canoes.

It was all so very peaceful and quiet that long before mid-day they were every one of them fast asleep. Some with their heads hanging over the sides, others had toppled over and lay across their

neighbours, and with their wide pink mouths agape were snoring noisily and unashamed.

The only other sounds that broke the silence were the ringing musical cries of the big black and white fish-eagles soaring high up in the blue vault overhead.

Hour after hour the canoemen ceaselessly paddled on, sometimes bursting forth into a lilting boating song which however disturbed the sleepers scarcely at all.

The first of the canoes, carrying Naju and Yidahonga, with Piga the ape and his little white friend, led the way, with the rest following in a bunch close behind. On rounding a sharp corner the pilot of the first craft roughly awoke the sleepers by a loud yell. Blinking stupidly, they all sat up, and when sufficiently awake to follow the direction in which he pointed, saw a sight that made them gape with astonishment.

Taking their daily bath and not more than a hundred paces away were a splendid herd of elephants. Long ivories gleaming in the sunlight; some of the herd rolled over and over in the water; others, filling their trunks, squirted it over themselves and each other in sparkling streams. The great grey males flapped their ears and squealed with joy as, looking artfully away in the opposite direction, they slyly sidled up to the fat little calves and with mighty shoves from their trunks sent them bowling over into the water. What a merry and joyous scene it was, and all the more interesting to this young Prince and his following that they had never before seen one of these vast

creatures, although of course they knew the immense tusks of ivory, for were there not many in the dwelling of Dungundega, their King, which had been sent to him as gifts from distant parts of his kingdom ?

Picking out the very biggest bull of the herd, Naju stood upright with the idea of letting fly a shaft; but it was not to be, for having at last sighted the canoes, the elephants threw up their long trunks and, trumpeting loudly, made for the shore and quickly vanished amongst the trees.

Now again the fleet continued softly on its way over the calm, glistening waters; but the expectation of seeing more elephants or some other equally interesting animal successfully banished sleep for the rest of the day.

But when the mid-day hour had come and gone a change came over this peaceful scene. Dark banks of thunder clouds rolled rapidly up and the wind lashed the water of the lake into angry waves. The canoes pitched and tossed from end to end, and here indeed was an unknown and startling development for these poor land-lubbers. Bravely at first they tried to pass it off by joking and laughing, but the laughs soon died away and their sable faces blanched to a sickly hue as they resigned themselves to this their first taste of seasickness.

Overhead the thunder boomed and crackled and streaks of violet lightning rent the heavens asunder. The fish eagles ceased from calling and flew to the land to take shelter in the trees.

With throbbing heads and breaking backs every

THE ELEPHANTS' BATH.

Facing p. 174.

man or youth baled madly to keep the canoes afloat, using the gourd drinking-cups and even the earthenware cooking-pots. But at their puny efforts the lake only laughed and churned itself to still greater fury. Very certain it was that not for much longer could the frail crafts live in such a sea. Quite close by lay the land, and over it hung a curtain of yellow haze, but whether they would be able to reach it before the boats fell to pieces seemed very doubtful. With a will the owners of the canoes worked at the paddles, but again and again did the waves fling the canoes back. Not in the end however to be drowned like rats in a sinking ship had the canoemen lived all their lives on the lake, so flinging a chant of defiance at both wind and water, they worked with all their might, forcing the vessels along, and gradually inch by inch carried their living cargoes nearer the shore. Straining, anxious eyes now scanned the nearby coastline, and with a rush of thankfulness spied nestling low down on the water's edge a cluster of grey thatched roofs.

So eager were Naju's following to be rid of the heaving canoes and feel once more the solid earth beneath their feet, that they were just about to fling themselves like children into the water and wade ashore, when the voice of one of the canoemen sang out in warning: "Where do you come from and what kind of innocents are you, not to know that lurking about in this water, waiting to trap the first comer, are many evil crocodiles? Beware, for when once the iron jaws of these scaly, slimy monsters fasten themselves around the body of a

man he is doomed to a terrible fate, for nothing can save him; for, drawn beneath the water by the steel-like grip, he is held down to drown and his body, dragged away to a cave beneath the water, is there left to lie, for King Crocodile is a filthy beast and likes not his meat too fresh."

Of the two evils, the lurking crocodiles or the heaving canoes, the former took first place in the minds of the men, and none ventured forth. They were however far too excited to sit quietly down and wait, so clinging to each other for support, up they all rose in the canoes, and standing thus by the aid of the straining paddlers, slowly, very slowly they drew near the shore. Already the perils and discomforts of the last few hours were beginning to fade from their minds in the joy of the prospect before them.

The tribulations of the day however, were not yet over. The evil fates held still another card. Seeing the moment was opportune, they played it in the form of a shower of arrows that rained thickly on our astonished wanderers. Of all things in heaven or earth that Naju and his following expected at that moment this was the very last. Shrill screams rent the air as the wounded men toppled overboard without even a hand stretched out to save them, so thunderstruck were their comrades at the suddenness of the onslaught. The soft pithy bark with which the canoes were built offered little or no protection, and following instantly on the first came yet another flight of the silent death-dealing darts. Many of them found a home in yielding flesh, others fixed themselves in the sides

of the craft, and some whistled past to strike the surrounding water.

Heedless of lurking crocodiles or other crawling reptiles, over the side of the canoe into the water went Naju. Grasping in his hand a gleaming copper spear, in a few strides he reached the shore. He neither spoke nor looked back, so certain was he that his men would follow him, and this they did—all those who were not dead or too badly wounded! Waiting only to snatch up their weapons, to a man they dashed through the water after their young leader. Not one instant did they hesitate to wonder why they had been attacked in this cowardly fashion; first catch the assailants, and then would they find out the meaning of it all, and catch them they most assuredly would, or be slain in the attempt.

Spurred on by this determination, across the strip of sand to the cluster of huts they went. "Scatter! Search thoroughly both inside and out each dwelling, see to it that neither man, woman nor child escapes," rang out the voice of their leader.

The search however proved merely a waste of time. Only one frail shrivelled old grandmother turned up, who, unable to walk, had been left behind to her fate. The wrinkled old face twitched with fear and the palsied body trembled as she gazed wildly with her bleary, tired old eyes at the circle of strange faces surrounding her. Sounds issued from her toothless mouth, but not a word could her questioners understand, so thrusting her back into the hut, they sped on up the strip of sand between the dwellings.

Arriving at the last hut, Naju turned to Amani and Amisi, the two trackers, who were close at his heels, and ordering them with all haste to pick out from amongst the footsteps scattered about in the sand the freshest tracks and follow them. "No matter where they go," he exclaimed, "lead on!"

Leaning on their spears, the rest waited quietly whilst the tiny brown-skinned men with bent backs carried on their search. At last having found what they sought, they beckoned, and without a word, and for all the world like a pair of their own curly-tailed hunting-dogs, off they set with nothing more to guide them than minute patches of moist sand from which the top layer had been disturbed by running feet. So plain to them, in fact, was the writing the sand revealed that not for one instant did they hesitate. Mile after mile on they raced, closely followed by their Prince and his men. Aromatic clumps of grey velvet-leaved sage here and there broke the monotony of dull brown sand, and straight for the biggest of one of these clumps led the human spoor.

Scarcely a leaf moved to show that a number of men lay hidden there, but nevertheless from deep down in the sand between the bushes, where they had burrowed like animals, one by one their would-be murderers were dragged forth, and a sorry enough crowd of wretches they looked as they stood hunched together after all were unearthed from their hiding-place.

In a circle around the cowering captives the triumphant bearers circled, and leaping high into the air, gave throat to the war-song of their tribe.

Waiting until the song had ended, Naju then led the way back to where the canoes had been left. Arrived at the lake shore, he and Yidahonga mustered their men to find out what casualties had been sustained. He then discovered that of those who at the beginning had fallen into the water nothing more had been seen or heard—only the well-gorged crocodiles could have told the tale—whilst the dead lay stretched on the sandy shore, where they had been carried by the owners of the canoes. Five of the big happy-go-lucky bearers lay still and quiet there, and by the side of them, never again to return to their dearly loved homes and boast to their many brothers and sisters of the wonderful things they had seen and done, lay also the dusky forms of two of the tiny pot-washers.

Backwards and forwards in front of the long line of captives now passed the young Prince, searching out the biggest and strongest of them to replace his dead bearers. Next the chief of the murderers was singled out, and to him was put the question as to why harmless strangers arriving to take shelter at his village had been attacked and murdered in so foul a manner. To this question however the man refused to reply, maintaining a sullen silence.

"Very well," said Naju, "place a cord around the man's neck, he too will do for a slave."

"Now," he continued, turning to his following, "here at your mercy are the murderers of your brothers and comrades; do with them what you will—show them no mercy and see to it that not one escapes. When you are satisfied that your

vengeance is complete you will find me at the village, for there we shall sleep to-night."

Accompanied by Yidahonga in charge of the new slaves, he moved away, leaving the rest of the murderers to their fate at the hands of the bearers.

The black thunder clouds had rolled themselves away, but deep sullen mutterings still boomed forth and the sickly yellow hue of the sky reflected itself in the churning water of the lake, whilst far down on the horizon the setting sun wallowed in a blaze of vermilion.

On the stagnant air the full-throated cry of the war song rang out exultantly, and on the edge of the lake, as in the heavens, there took place another scarlet sunset.

CHAPTER X

Adventures on the Inland Sea

THROUGH the damp chill mist that hung over the water, just as the dawn heralded another day, the heavily laden canoes glided away from that fateful spot.

Firmly fixed in the prows of each of the vessels, slender bamboo poles swayed gently, and from them swung clusters of gory heads—trophies of war which had been none of Naju's seeking.

Scorned was the thought of a life for a life. Six lives to one had been the price paid for the five dead bearers, the two small pot-washers and those others who had gone to feed the crocodiles.

No triumphant war-song announced this departure, for with chattering teeth the naked sable bodies shivered in the chill air. But not for long did the generous sun deny his warming rays to these his true worshippers. In a glory of purple and orange the great orb swam slowly over the horizon, gilding the water to a sheet of purest gold, and the fleecy grey night-clouds, dallying across the sky, vanished at his approach. Through this glory of sea and sky the canoes pushed lazily, carrying their drowsy occupants. Drowsy they might be, but none dared actual sleep lest they lose a glimpse of some rare sight.

Eager eyes searched the shore line, where tall spear-grass growing to the water's edge waved airy silver fronds. Warming himself on one big rock, there sat an old father baboon who had led his numerous offspring down to drink. Chattering noisily, his merry family disported themselves in some nearby bushes, whilst he, with his little fierce brown eyes placed close together above a long canine snout, watched the canoes glide past. But his understanding failed to grasp what this strange commotion was about, so he felt no fear.

A little farther on, and the vigilance of the watchers was well rewarded.

On the shingle by the water's edge lay a curious grey heap which they took at first to be a massive rock, but with nevertheless a something soft about the outline proclaiming it flesh and blood.

Nearer and nearer the canoes approached to find out what it really was, and when only a few paces away that supposed rock came to life with a vengeance. For, with a loud gurgling grunt, it stretched itself contentedly and rolled over on its side, exposing a pink glistening belly and four short legs. The narrow head with its two stubby ears, and a mighty cavernous mouth that uncovered itself at the same moment proclaimed that here was nothing more or less than one of the great water horses. Only *he* could have told why he lay, fully exposed, alone and asleep at that hour of the day. For was it not the custom of his kind to spend their nights in a wide ramble through the marshes searching for food, but at the very first glimmering of dawn to slide back into their watery

playground, there to stay until the sunset again? Perhaps he had wandered further afield than usual, which had unduly wearied him, or it might be that he had by chance tumbled across fresh feeding grounds and gorged himself so heartily with juicy reeds that, even having reached the water's edge, he still felt unequal to make the final effort and dive in, but tempted by the soft sand and warm sunshine, had instead laid himself down to sleep! Be the reason what it may, there he lay plain for all to see.

Standing upright in the canoes, Naju and his men craned their necks and gazed eagerly at this the first hippopotamus they had ever beheld.

But even in a deep sleep that magic sixth sense of his never deserted the great beast, and it now warned him that he was no longer alone. Opening his tiny eyes, deep sunk under their bony protruding sockets, he gazed steadily at the intruders. Although not really afraid, his first natural instinct was to make for the deep water, but to this desired haven the canoes barred his way. Disregarding this most aggravating fact, he nevertheless heaved himself up, and sliding into the water, was quickly lost to sight.

Having in his haste forgotten to fill his lungs with sufficient air, Behemoth was soon driven to rise quickly to the surface to breathe, and there, to the thrilling delight of the occupants of the canoes, found himself right in their very midst. Anyhow, he was anything but pleased, and felt a decided instinct to bite and bite really hard. Opening his monstrous mouth, showing a lolling

pink tongue, mountainous molars and tusks curving down over the lips, he snapped viciously at the nearest object, whereby the end of one of the canoes crumpled off like rotten wood, precipitating its astonished occupants into the water. Having accomplished this bit of devilry to his own complete satisfaction, the animal then dived below once more and only came to the surface again some distance away, where the tip of his head and two stubby ears poked defiantly above the water.

Those of the men who had been thrown into the water, carrying in their mind's eye a vivid picture of slimy, scaly crocodiles, lost no time in scrambling over the sides of the nearest canoe, and off they went again.

The mid-day sun poured fiercely down, warming the lake water; and the sides of the vessels, as well as the muddy pools in the bottoms of the boats, became less chilly as it washed around the naked limbs of the occupants. Only the rhythmic sound of the paddles broke the silence, for even the fish-eagles ceased from calling and were perched on the topmost branches of the trees taking a wide-eyed siesta. Not by any means however were these birds as indifferent and disinterested as they appeared, for ever and anon they swooped down, and one splendid fellow, with a loud swish of his wings, rose from a branch, and hovering for an instant over the spot where his intended victim swam happily below, swooped straight as a dart and rose again with the glistening fish clutched between his talons. Such clever fishers are these great eagles that, unable to eat all they take from the water,

ADVENTURE WITH A HIPPOPOTAMUS.

Facing p. 184

their prey are often dropped and left untouched on the sands.

To-day no thunder clouds roll up, and the lake continues a sheet of unbroken calm! Taking advantage of this, the canoemen left the shore, which up to now they had been hugging closely. Out in the deep water whole schools of the monster hippo watched with curious eyes the passing of this crowd of strangers, and the noble old bulls, around which gambolled the females, their podgy shapeless calves asprawl on broad fat backs, fearlessly stood their ground even when, as often happened, the fleet passed right through their very midst.

In this wild waste of water fear of the human kind was unknown, for the only men who ever came near the lake, let alone passed across it, were the fisherfolk in their bobbing canoes. These simple savage people saw no reason to slay or injure the noble brutes, therefore even at sight of this unusually big crowd of men the hippopotami felt no fear. How strange a fact it was that at the end of the lake, where stood Mulizi's village, not a single hippo had ever been seen, yet here they abounded in thousands. Maybe the inhospitable mountains of that region, reaching as they did right to the very rim of the lake, was the reason for this, for there lay none of the warm boggy marshes where grew such quantities of the tall bamboo grass and reeds whose tender, juicy shoots are the favourite food of these water-loving animals.

Once past the mid-day hour the heat became so intense that even these beasts themselves ceased

their gambols and, quitting the water, for a spell lay around in their hundreds on the low sandbanks. Like so many vast grey hogs they lay, some on their stomachs, others on their sides, and others again flat on their backs, with short thick legs and four-toed feet sticking up, whilst over and around their elders, the fat pinky calves romped and wallowed in the warm loose sand.

When passing one such crowded sandbank the too sudden approach of the canoes startled a herd of the vast creatures. Into the water they slid and, led by a big old bull, swam two by two in a line in front of the canoes; but overcome by curiosity, when having gone but a short distance they stopped dead, spun round and gazed their fill at the intruders of their peace.

From dawn until now, the sunset hour, the slaves had squatted close and their limbs were cramped and weary. Small wonder, then, that the first glimpse of their destination, the lowlands lying blue and misty in the distance, caused a thrill of joy. Even the jaded canoemen put on a fresh spurt of energy and chanted a tribal boating song, the chorus of which the whole company shouted lustily. But it was not before the sun had sunk that the dripping paddles were finally laid aside for the day and thrice weary arms and shoulders allowed to rest.

Yelling and whooping at the top of their voices, the released bearers gleefully snatched up their loads and, jostling each other through the surf, dumped them on the sand. Of the darkness, hiding heaven only knew what of unknown perils, they

paid no heed, but sped away in search of wood for the fires; whilst the remainder, dragging out the cooking vessels, filled them in readiness for a meal. Having been unable to replenish the nearly exhausted food supply at Mulizi's villages, sad to relate, very little remained in the food sacks; but let the morrow take care of itself is ever the motto of these sons of Ham. Eat and be merry they were going to be that night at all costs, for they had tasted nothing since the previous day. When not a scrap remained, out came the pipes and were plugged with a generous handful of the soothing weed and lit with a glowing ember laid on the bowl.

Away on the outer edge of the crowd, silent and each absorbed in his own thoughts, sat Naju and Yidahonga. After having been so kindly received and generously treated by all the tribes through whose country they had travelled, why had these simple fisherfolk turned hostile and deliberately tried to murder them all? This was the question that passed again and again through Naju's head and to which he could find no answer. Was it a case of killing for the sake of killing? Or did some other deep motive underlie their actions?

The captured chief had so far refused to reply to the questions put to him, but he was still here with the rest of the captives, so why not have him up and make him speak. If he chose to do so of his own accord, well and good; if not, pressure should be brought to bear, but know the truth about the affair he most decidedly would. So Naju now ordered Yidahonga to go and bring the newly captured slaves before him.

When they arrived and were placed in a row he commanded the chief to step forward.

"Now, listen to me," he began. "So far you have stubbornly refused to tell me why, together with your men, you chose to attack, in so cowardly a manner, peaceful strangers arriving to take shelter in your kraal. You must have some motive for so wanton a crime, and I intend to know what that motive is; so once again I ask you, why did you try to murder both me and my slaves?"

To this question the chief again made no reply, nor did he deign to look up, but remained with his eyes fixed sullenly on the ground.

"Now beware how you act," warned Naju, furious at the man's insolent silence; "one more chance shall be given you—after that an answer will be wrung from you with a hippo whip. Once more and for the last time, what was your motive?" But again the man remained mute.

"Bring out the whip, Yidahonga," Naju commanded, cold with fury, "and flog this insolent dog until he deigns to answer me."

When the Swahili, who up to now had stood unnoticed outside the circle of firelight, stepped forward, a wave of fear blanched the faces of the other captives at sight of the thick knotted muscles in his arms and shoulders, and the slender, vicious thong in his hand. But not so their chief, as with a smile of contempt curving his lips he stretched himself as he was bid, flat on the ground.

Like a living thing the cruel thong wound itself again and again around his body. But the pain of the lashes was as nothing compared to his mental

agony that he, a chief of the land, should be beaten like a slave, and that, too, before some of his own subjects. Nevertheless rather than break the vow of silence he would suffer this and if needs be a thousand times worse. So the flogging went steadily on, and only the tightly clenched fists with the long nails piercing the flesh told the tale of his agony, for he uttered not a word.

Of poorer, weaker clay however were his comrades fashioned. To stand helplessly by and see their chief and brother punished in so ignominious a fashion was more than they could bear. For every lash that descended on his back they suffered in sympathy. At last one of their number rushed forward, and throwing himself on his knees in front of Naju, grasped his cloak in both hands.

"Oh, noble Prince, have mercy on our brother and bid your headman stay his arm, for then will I tell you all you desire to know."

As Yidahonga stopped to listen, the loudly spoken words fell on the ears of the man on the ground. Springing to his feet, he dashed at the speaker and, clutching him by the throat, shook him like a rat. "Be silent, fool," he shouted. "Have I suffered this shameful flogging in silence only to be betrayed by you? Cease your babbling, hound!"

Naju however eager to hear what the slave could tell him, called to four of his bearers to lead the chief away out of hearing and to keep good guard over him until he should bid them return.

"Now," he said to the man, "tell your story as briefly as possible, for I am weary of this business."

The bearers, the cooks, and even the pygmy trackers crowded around the group, eager not to miss a word of the story.

"Although," began the man, "our brave chief has succeeded in making you believe that only his own insolence and contempt have kept him from telling you what you wish to know, this, as you shall hear, is not the case and is only feigned to hide his real reason, which is a command of silence imposed upon him by the chieftainess Mulizi, who is at the same time his sister.

"It happened in this way. When yesterday, together with some of my neighbours, we were hoeing in the gardens a message on the drum urged us to hurry back to the village. We arrived to find our chief listening intently to a document read out by one whom we at first took to be a stranger, but soon recognised as a man well known throughout the country as the fleetest runner of Mulizi's court.

"Eagerly we stood around to listen, and this is what we heard. 'That ever great and noble woman, your sister, sends you greeting. She sends at the same time a warning to beware of one named Naju, a Prince of the Mutuzi, who is journeying through this country accompanied by his friend and adviser, a brawny bully and ruffian named Yidahonga. With him too are a cowardly pack of slaves who, in spite of the royal generosity which was showered upon them, intercepted and robbed one of the daily food columns arriving from the royal plantations. I forgave them this evil deed, and when my fighting men begged to be allowed

to attack the strangers and drive them away I forbade them to do so. But, mark you, notwithstanding all this largeness of heart, when I, Mulizi, made an honourable proposal to this ruffian Yidahonga to become the leader of my armies, what did he do but laugh at Me, yes, flinging the words back into my teeth, he laughed at me, than which there is no greater insult in this world.

"'Early this very morning,' the message continued, 'a fleet of our canoes set out to carry this young Prince and his following across the lake. Certain it is that they cannot stay in the canoes all night but must needs search for a place in which to sleep. It may even be that they will pitch on your village as a landing-place. In this event, I, Mulizi, bid you remember the insult and injury I have suffered at their hands. Should it lie in your power to vindicate my honour I bid you know that the deed will not go unrewarded, that you, my brother, shall be raised to a position of the highest honour. But, and this is of the greatest importance, should you fail and perchance find yourself a prisoner, I forbid you even to mention my name or connect me in any way with the affair. So strongly do I urge this fact that my messenger is instructed to stay until he can carry back with him your most solemn promise.'

"Thus spoke Mulizi's messenger, to which our chief replied as follows: 'Go, and with all haste return to my sister, bid her know that if it lies in my power her honour shall be avenged. At the present moment only a mere handful of my men are at home in the village, for they spend the

greater part of their days in the canoes; but for all that these strangers shall be taught not to insult and rob a member of our house. You may at the same time tell Mulizi to fear nothing, for I swear on oath that come what may her name shall not pass my lips in connection with this revenge.'"

The slave having now finished his story, he salaamed deeply and stepped back to where his comrades stood.

Now when they heard of the cunning and treachery of the old chieftainess a babble of angry voices broke out from the company. Understanding nothing of her proposal to Yidahonga, they looked upon what had taken place simply as an act of wilful spite against themselves. However wrong they had been to touch the precious food column, still, had they not suffered their punishment without a word, and what was more, had not the chieftainess professed herself as satisfied? Then this act of vengeance was a mean and paltry thing. Eagerly they crowded around their leader and through the mouth of their spokesman begged to be taken back across the lake the very next day that they might punish this cruel, heartless old woman who had so callously condemned them to death.

This however Naju would not allow, for said he: "Of what avail to burn down her village and take both her and her people slaves? What is done cannot be undone, and nothing can bring to life again your brothers and comrades." With this he ordered the men to disperse; but as they took their

places around the fires again angry mutters and dire threats of vengeance boded ill for Mulizi if at any time in the distant future they should happen to find themselves in the vicinity of her village.

One other man there was in that assembly who looked at the matter from still another point of view. As he listened to the man's story, that last scene on the sand, before the canoes sailed, rose up before Yidahonga's eyes, and for the first time in his life he realised how far-reaching may be the results of a contemptuous laugh, especially if it be at a woman's expense.

Naju wondered too what the proposal was that had been made to Yidahonga and at which he had so unwittingly laughed. Still, he asked no questions, for in his adviser and friend he placed implicit confidence. Yidahonga, realising that his friend and master must be curious to know, he decided to tell him the simple truth, so after they had reseated themselves on the sleeping-mats he told his tale.

And that was the end of the affair, for never again was the subject mentioned between them.

* * * * *

Wrapped around by the warm darkness, lulled by the song of the surf breaking gently on the shore, the whole company were very soon wrapped in slumber. Waiting until all was silent, Naju then arose, and picking his way carefully between the sleeping forms, came to where the captives lay.

Only one of their number squatted sleepless and wide-eyed by a dying fire, and that was the chief. Naju, placing his finger on his lips as a warning to him to keep silent, bent down and with his long hunting-knife severed the cord that bound this man to the others; then drawing himself upright, he pointed to where the canoes lay beached.

For fear of awaking the sleepers, the liberated chief spoke no word, but fixed his eyes on the face of this generous young Prince in a look of gratitude; then salaaming low to the ground, he melted away into the darkness.

Once back in his place by the fires Naju, like the rest of his following, was very quickly asleep. Then out of their watery playground came the great hippopotami who, as they passed the slumbering camp, paused for a moment to gaze at the twinkling fires, wondering what it was all about. Their curiosity satisfied however they browsed slowly and peacefully along to their feeding grounds.

After the long day spent in their midst no hint of danger at the near presence of these lumbering beasts disturbed the dreams of Naju and his men, and all unheeded the still night hours sped swiftly by.

"How came it to pass that the watchmen gave no warning?" was the cry the following morning when talking over the unexpected events that took place before the dawn. But to this question the answer was soon forthcoming, for on this night of all nights no watchmen had even been appointed. Never before had such an oversight occurred, nor

would it again, for the lesson taught by a bitter experience is the one amongst all others most rarely forgotten.

The first intimation that all was not as it should be came in the form of a shower of hot ashes and burning embers that rained on the unprotected bodies of the sleepers.

The first to awake was Naju, and still dazed with sleep, he sat up and peered around; but yet another burning shower struck him violently, so springing to his feet, he moved a few paces away, dimly conscious all the time of a pungent reek of burning flesh. Then there followed such a pandemonium that, strive how he would, it was impossible to understand what was taking place, for a crowd of frantic, sleep-soddened men dashed screaming in all directions, endeavouring to avoid the storms of fire that again and again shot up into the air, whilst the earth vibrated and shook with the sound of stamping blows mingled with hoarse, and angry grunts.

Not until the frightened crowd had at last cleared away from the spot and a forgotten log, fanned by a breeze from the water, flared brightly, did he catch the first glimpse of the disturber of their rest, and at the same time noticed that of all his large following not a man remained. Only Yidahonga stood close by, and a few paces away the two small pygmies waited, their round eyes wide with wonder.

In the midst of a litter of cooking-pots, sleeping-mats and scattered logs, some of them ever and anon blazing brightly, stood the midnight marauder,

an ancient grey bull hippopotamus! For all the notice he took of the watching men he might well have been alone, so intent was he on his work of destruction. But not with any puny human beings was he concerned; it was the bright night fires against which he harboured a grudge. From one to another he passed, striking at them with his mighty hoofs and with rapid kicks scattering the ashes and embers in all directions.

After a time, his first fit of anger having spent itself, his actions became slower and slower, and then only a realisation that he was no longer alone dawned on the slow-thinking beast, and pivoting round on his hind legs, he turned to face the little band of men.

Although carefully noting his every movement and realising fully that it was a mere matter of seconds before he charged them, there was just one thing which Naju and his men were still in ignorance of, and that was, the quickness with which this ponderous animal could cover the ground. Even as they watched the hippo lowered his gigantic face, with its cavernous mouth and two curving tusks, and hurled himself towards them.

So swift was the action that the animal was upon them before they had time to move. Only Naju, as the cumbrous body passed, swung his spear and struck with all his might. But the weapon, instead of sinking into the flesh as intended, struck harmlessly on one of the beast's massive shoulder-blades. The force of the charge and the weight of its great body drove the hippo well outside the circle of firelight into the darkness, whither his attackers

were far too wise to follow, and so place themselves more or less at his mercy.

There was no shadow of a doubt however that so dauntless a foe would return to follow up his attack, and barely a second elapsed when the sound of heavy footsteps warned them that he was again coming to the charge.

Right into the circle of firelight came the huge grey shape again, but not a second time were his attackers to be taken unawares! As it reached them they jumped nimbly aside and it tore harmlessly through their midst.

Closing in in a half-circle, they rushed after the animal, a very few paces bringing them up with it. That one well-placed blow is more fatal than a dozen haphazard ones is a fact well known to every hunter, but on this occasion neither Naju nor his men were given time to judge their aim, but must needs strike when and where they could.

Two by two they raced along on either side of the lumbering brute until at last the opportunity came and four heavy spears flew to their mark. With the lances now firmly embedded in its body the wounded hippo showed signs of collapse, and very soon, sinking to its knees, rolled over on to the ground, apparently dead.

Eagerly they crowded around to gaze at this fallen foe, but the game was not yet ended. Beremouth had yet to play his final card! Even as they watched, with a mighty heave that astonished the onlookers, it struggled again to its feet, steadied itself for a moment, then dashed away in an ungainly gallop towards the lake. A minute afterwards a

noisy splash told the listeners that in spite of its wounds it had reached the water.

It was indeed a sorry crowd of bearers who dwindled back to the spot once the danger was over, and even more shamefaced were they when they learnt later that, owing to their cowardice in running away, the newly captured slaves taken the previous day had also made good their escape.

CHAPTER XI

Kolilo, Chief of the Fisherfolk

It made no difference at what hour of the night Naju lay down to sleep, dawn always found him awake to greet it.

Thus it happened that, in the early morning on the wild shores of that great inland sea, whilst the rest of his following still lay stretched on their mats asleep, he alone sat up to gaze and marvel at this new and strangely beautiful world around.

Scarcely light though it yet was, the creatures of the wild were up and doing, for along the sandy edges of the lake droves of waterfowl darted nimbly about on their long slim legs, hungrily searching for the fat grubs or succulent shellfish left by the outgoing tide.

On the smooth, gently heaving water itself stately white pelicans floated to and fro, or dived below the surface to emerge again with a wriggling, glistening fish held in their monstrous beaks.

Not until the sun rose and thrust his dazzling rays full into their faces did the rest of the sleepers awake. Then one by one they sat up, rubbed the sleep from their eyes, yawned loudly and, clambering

slowly to their feet, wandered away to fetch the wood and water with which to cook the morning meal. Their young leader and his henchman would also doubtless do ample justice to the meal when once it was cooked and laid before them; but that time had not yet come, so meanwhile they too rose and strode down to the lake.

Once arrived at the water's edge however they paused in astonishment, for a very strange sight indeed greeted their eyes. Within a few paces of the bank, bobbing merrily about, were four short, thick wooden stumps, or so it seemed at that distance. A few hasty strides brought them to the spot, and a closer look revealed the fact that the stumps were nothing more or less than the legs of a dead hippopotamus floating on his back, whilst beneath them, showing plainly with every wash of the waves, glistened the animal's round pink belly and gigantic head.

The mere sight of a live hippopotamus in their midst during the night had sent the bearers running for their lives, so now the news of a dead one brought them pelting to the spot. Those of their number still left in the camp, shouting through cupped hands, the news to their brethren gathering wood.

Back they came from all directions to join the mad scamper over the sand to the lake-edge. A chattering throng with only one thought in their heads—"meat, meat!"

The bank under which the carcase floated was a fairly steep one, but so eager were the greedy

men to begin their feast that they actually attempted to hoist it on to their shoulders.

For a time Naju smilingly watched their struggles, and then his voice reached them.

"If you would only pause a second," he said, "and reason it out calmly instead of acting so foolishly, you will soon see how much more easy it would be to first shove the body through the water to where the bank is sloping and then to roll it ashore."

But the hippo was an immense bull and heavy, so at first very little headway was made. Only when one of their number started to sing a tribal song and the rest stayed their efforts to heave in unison to the melody did they at last succeed in landing the vast carcase high and dry on the sand.

Having once decided where to make the first cuts, long sharp hunting-knives flashed in the sunshine, and the meat was stripped off in thick slices from the bones, being then flung into red heaps on the ground. Little wood fires were quickly lit, and soon juicy chunks of the coarse-fibred flesh, held between forked sticks, sizzled merrily.

Leaving his men thus happily employed, Naju accompanied by Yidahonga, set off to a spot further along the shore to take their long-delayed bathe. Ahead of the two tall figures ambled the sturdy Piga. At the last moment however he decided that getting wet was not a thing he really cared about after all, so down he squatted on the sand to watch his masters as they dived and plunged

through the water. Then out they came again, and the very next instant saw Piga thrown flat on his back the while two pairs of hard, doubled fists pummelled the breath out of his rubber-like body. Nor was that all, for Naju and Yidahonga, each taking an arm, they swung him backwards and forwards and then with a final heave flung him far out into the deep water.

Gasping and spluttering, he rose again to the surface and turned to look for his tormentors, but lo and behold, they had gone and were to be seen two ebony glistening figures skimming away over the yellow sands.

Well, this young ape, to say the least of it, was not built for running, so thought he, "if they expected him, with his heavy body and little short legs, to catch up with them, they would be disappointed; that's all there was to that." But Piga could, when he wanted to, appear very dignified, and this seemed a proper occasion to do so. So out of the water he came and ambled proudly back to the camp.

Once arrived there however all further thoughts of dignity fled from his mind, for—oh, joy!—not a soul remained on guard, the whole camp with its scattered belongings lay absolutely at his mercy.

Food was his first thought as he spied the pots of rice left to simmer on the fire. To be sure the rice was only partly cooked, but "what odds!" Boldly he grasped the steaming vessels and tipped their contents on to a mat to cool, as he had so often seen it done. He then carefully placed the

empty earthen pots back on to the fire, where in a few seconds, to his great delight, with a loud bang they broke to pieces with the heat.

Fortunately, whilst he was still occupied stuffing himself with the half-cooked rice, Naju and Yida-honga, glowing with their long race over the sand, returned, and so for a time put an end to his love of wanton destruction.

It was, for once at least, a thoroughly satisfied, well-gorged crowd of men who, as the mid-day hour approached, dwindled slowly back to the sleeping place.

In their usual heedless manner no thought had been taken for the following day, and out of that vast pile of meat not one scrap remained. But what mattered that, when before them stretched this great lake teeming with its shoals of fish ? So far, unfortunately, they had been unable to think how these same fish were to be caught ; but they had boundless faith in their young leader, and doubtless he would think of some way out of the difficulty.

In the meantime the one thing above all others they longed to do was to stretch themselves down on the ground and sleep off the effects of too heavy a feed of partly cooked flesh.

This they quickly did, but not for long were they left to sleep undisturbed.

Up to now not one of their number had ventured further than the strip of sand surrounding the lake, so what kind of country lay beyond the dense belt of feathery, flowering shrub growing around its edge, nobody knew.

It was all the more disturbing, therefore, when breaking rudely into their slumber came the sound of many voices singing a lilting song. Up they sat, and with the memory of the last encounter with the fisherfolk fresh in their minds, gazed around with startled eyes.

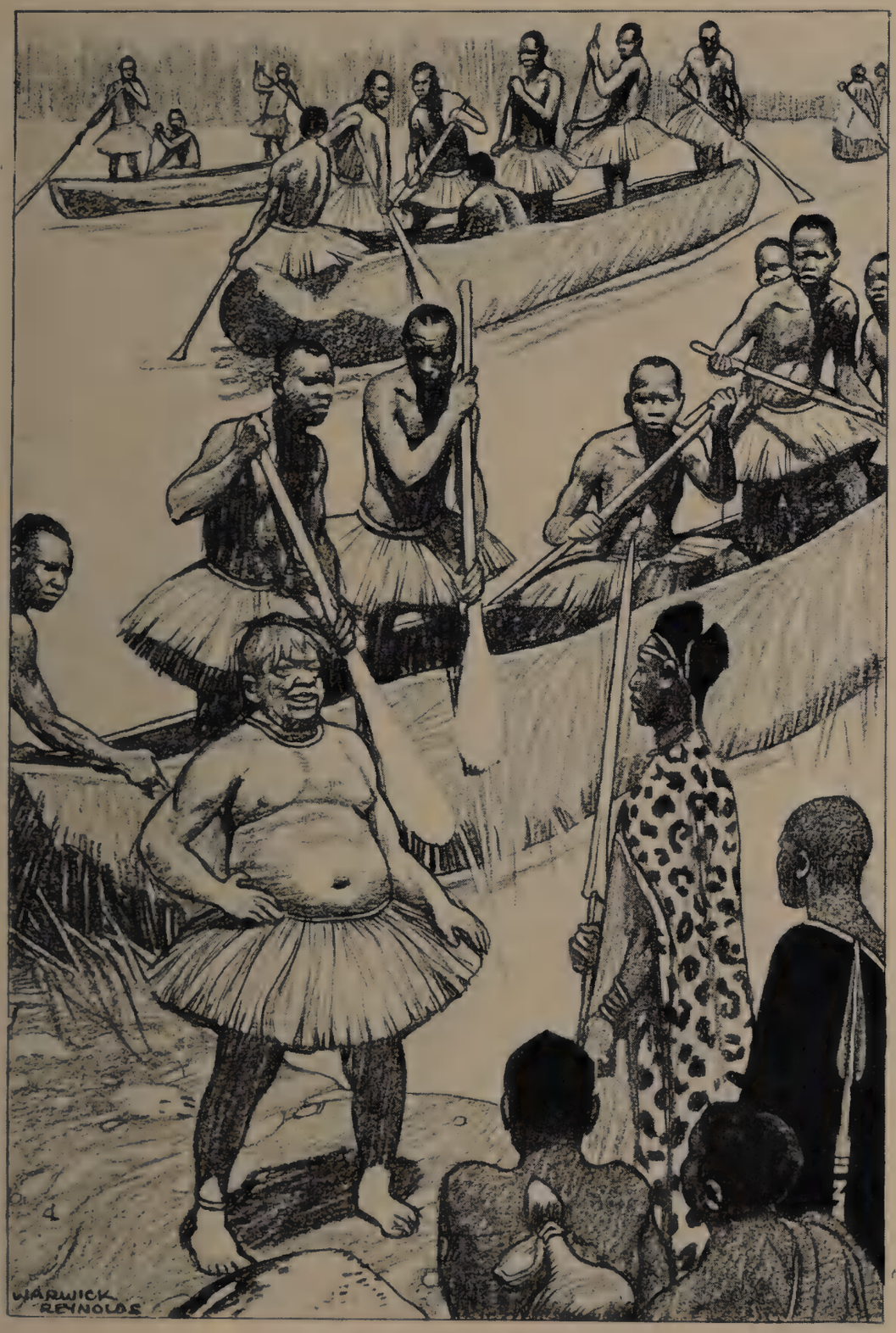
There was nothing to fear for the present however for the nearest cover likely to conceal an enemy lay well outside range of the most powerful weapons.

At that instant a fresh and even louder burst of music drifted to their ears, and this time there was no mistaking the direction from which it came. Every eye turned and scanned the shimmering water in front of them, and there, drifting through the mirage towards them, came a large fleet of canoes.

"It is impossible at this distance to judge whether these strangers come as friends or enemies," exclaimed Naju to his following, as grasping their spears they gathered around him; "however after our one bitter experience of a few days ago we must never again be taken unawares, so bring your weapons and come with me to the water's edge to meet them."

Leading the way, several boat-lengths in advance of a dozen or more smaller vessels, came one monster canoe, and at the head of it sat a solitary figure. As the prow of the craft nosed its way into the sandy shore, the paddlers in the other vessels ceased their musical song.

Naju then rose to his feet and, with Yidahonga close by his side, strode down to the lake-edge.



KOLILO THE ALBINO.

Facing p. 204.

But the words of greeting he was about to offer died on his lips at the first glimpse of the extraordinary man who stepped ashore and came forward to meet him.

Naju saw before him a figure of medium height only but of an abnormal girth. The wide mouth, at that moment curved into a grin, revealing long yellow teeth filed to fang-like points, was surmounted by a broad flat nose. Above this nose, if nose it could be called, gleamed the pink eyes of an albino beneath tufts of shaggy, tawny hair. The creature was all but naked and the pale-hued skin of his body was splotched and speckled with sickly coloured freckles that ran one into another.

Having recovered from his first bout of astonishment, it occurred to Naju that twice already this extraordinary man had offered him a very cordial greeting and that so far this advance had not been acknowledged; so taking a step forward, he salaamed and then held out his hand.

But yet a further surprise awaited Naju, for the voice in which the albino made his reply was deep and husky, yet with a pleasantly soft intonation.

"I perceive," he said, "that my arrival has caused you and your following a great deal of astonishment; but after all there is nothing extraordinary about it if you will but allow me to explain.

"My name," he continued, "is Kolilo, and the village over which I rule lies some two hours distant from here, on the shores of the lake. My people are all fisherfolk, and two of the men were out on

the water yesterday at sunset, when they saw a big fleet of canoes approaching. Becoming afraid, they landed, hid their canoes in the undergrowth and ran to tell me of what they had seen. By that time, however, it was too dark to come and greet you as I should otherwise have done; but the fires you built last night told me in which directon to search, and here I am."

As the man finished speaking Naju nodded in reply to this very simple explanation. He then turned and led the way to where the sleeping-mats still lay, and with a wave of his hand invited this queer chief and his men to be seated.

"Yes," he said to Kolilo, "what you say is right; for not having thought about the matter one way or another, we had no idea that a village lay so close by, and were therefore startled at your sudden approach. But what astonishes me even more is that you should come all unarmed in this friendly manner to greet strangers about whom you can know nothing. Did it not occur to you that our intentions might be evil ones?"

"No," answered Kolilo, "such a thought never entered my head. Nevertheless I confess that it would interest me very greatly to hear who you are and from whence you come."

"Then that is soon told," said Naju, "for I am the fourth son of Dungundega, King of the Ruanda. When I was born my father already possessed three sons. So very little chance was there that I should ever inherit the throne,

that for this reason they named me Naju, which in our language means the fourth or the *poor* son.

"My mother, happily, is the King's favourite wife, so the thought of the future of her child troubled my father greatly.

"Then an old and trusted adviser at the court, one named Saigilo, solved the problem by suggesting that I should go out into the world and see some of the marvellous things that exist in it, and perchance discover a kingdom of my own. It was just such a future as my father himself would have loved had he been free to choose. My mother also was delighted and at once gave her consent; so from that day began the training which was to fit and harden me for this life of adventure.

"When I reached the age of fourteen my parents decided that the time had now come for me to start away; so sixty of the strongest and most loyal slaves were picked to accompany me, also Yidahonga the eldest son of this same Saigilo has come with me as guide and friend.

"It would take many days to tell you all the wonderful things we have seen and done since leaving the Ruanda, but this much is very certain, that I shall ever be grateful to my parents for the way in which they arranged my future.

"We have passed through some very strange experiences in the last few days. Only last night, for instance, one of the great water horses took it into his foolish head to stamp out the night fires. Fortunately we were successful in slaying this dangerous brute!"

Seated cross-legged on a mat, Kolilo listened attentively whilst Naju recounted all his adventures, at intervals nodding his head to show that he understood. But when at last he heard how the hippopotamus had been slain he gazed from Naju to Yidahonga and back again with a look of undisguised admiration in his little pink eyes.

"You are a stranger to these parts," he said, "therefore cannot know that in killing this beast you have rendered my tribe a very great service. For, let me tell you that on account of this same rogue hippopotamus many moons have passed since the people were able to visit this spot to catch fish. The last time he came, not only did this animal stamp out the fires, badly scorching and burning his body, but he also succeeded in catching one man and with his monstrous mouth tore his shoulder away from his trunk.

"As I said before, my people are only simple fisherfolk, possessing neither the weapons nor the knowledge with which to slay so dangerous a creature. By this action you have earned their deepest gratitude. If there is any way in which we can serve you and so pay a portion of our debt, you have only to command us."

"Your generous offer comes at a most opportune moment," then replied Naju, "for I am told that we have only a very little food left in the sacks, so maybe you can aid us to obtain a further supply.

"Firstly, though, I am anxious to know what kind of country must we pass through when we leave this lake?"

"It is indeed fortunate that I arrived in time to warn you before you set out," Kolilo replied, "for as soon as you pass beyond this strip of sand ahead, for many days lies a vast, trackless swamp, and of one thing I am very certain, that had you once entered this without a guide you would never have left it again, for it is covered with hidden pits and treacherous bogs.

"Amongst my people I could, if necessary, find a man who would show you the way, but I have in my head at the moment a far better plan than that, if it meets with your approval.

"See now. It has long been my wish to leave for a while the trials and cares of chieftainship and take a journey through the country, but up to now there has been no one who could take my place, and although I possess many children I considered them too young to be burdened with so responsible a position. Now however I am free to go, for my eldest son, a wise and serious youth, has just come of age and is now old enough to take my place.

"This, then, is my proposal, that together with your large following you now come with me to my village and stay there until the people gather and prepare the foodstuffs you mention.

"When that is done and your slaves have rested, then a fresh start can be made, and should you be willing, I myself will accompany you for the first part of your journey, and by so doing accomplish two ends—the satisfaction of my own wishes, and a desire to aid you in every possible way."

Here, indeed, was a very tempting offer, but for

the space of a second Naju wavered, for the appearance of the man was such as to rouse the very liveliest distrust. But then again he reasoned, "would this chief have placed both himself and his men at my mercy by coming here unarmed if he intended any evil?" This thought was reassuring, so having pondered awhile, he decided to accept Kolilo's offer.

"Good," he said, turning to Kolilo. "Then that is decided, for I accept your most generous offer, and from now on we place ourselves in your hands."

It was a noisy crowd of men, happy at the thought of this new turn of affairs, who followed the albino chief down to where his canoes lay beached.

One glance at the people manning the vessels proved that, let the appearance of the chief be what it might, his subjects at least were both prosperous and happy. Unlike the nude fisherfolk of Mulizi's tribe, these people wore around their hips a short kilt of plaited marsh grass, the deep fringes of which swayed with every movement. Their features too were small and straight, their eyes wide-set and clear, whilst the skin of their slim graceful bodies gleamed like polished ebony.

Even the canoes differed and were wide, clean, roomy vessels, hollowed-out in one piece out of gigantic tree-trunks, with no leaking cracks, stopped with mud, to let in the water.

The largest of the canoes, carrying only Naju, Yidahonga and the chief Kolilo, led the way, and heavily laden though they were, the rest of the

fleet followed, riding easily and lightly behind. With a cloudless blue sky overhead they skimmed merrily over the glittering water, whilst around them, as far as the eye could reach, scenting the air with their almond fragrance, monster cream, pink and blue water-lilies floated amidst their own wide-spreading leaves.

Then again they glided through a mist of silky-winged May-flies, drifting in dark clouds over the lake, whilst on the surface of the water floated dense patches of the unhatched larva of these same tiny insects around which leapt shoals of greedy fish, gorging themselves on the fat grubs.

All too soon for the happy travellers Kolilo's village appeared in sight, a mere collection of grey huts set in a wide expanse of sand, gleaming golden in the still bright sunshine.

Warned by the song of the paddlers, the villagers swarmed out from the houses and were already down by the water's edge to receive the new arrivals.

As the vessels grounded these happy folk broke into a loud song of welcome, and while the men raced up and down singing lustily, the women and children, their grass skirts bobbing merrily, clustered around the canoes. A chattering, noisy throng, they escorted their chief and his guests across to the village, for of a truth it was a welcome break in the quiet monotony of their lives. They gathered in groups to watch the strangers with the little pot-bellied babies playing and wallowing about their knees.

First they gazed at Naju, where he stood in the midst of a group of headmen, for he was a truly princely figure with his tall slim form wrapped in his royal cloak of leopard skins and leaning on a big burnished spear.

Their eyes then wandered curiously and timidly to where Yidahonga stood with the young shaggy black ape by his side; but when it came to the bearers the women at least were obliged to turn away, feigning shyness at the bold, admiring glances flung back at them by the handsome slaves.

Nothing more simple could well be imagined than the homes of these fisherfolk, for they were nothing more than little round huts, built of poles, plastered with grey clay and thatched with long yellow grass.

The lake, teeming with its abundance of fish, fully supplied their needs, so they cultivated no plantations. All day long the sun poured down on the village, for not a single tree or shrub grew near enough to it to throw a patch of shade. These people were however true sun worshippers, and when not out on the water catching fish, sat around in groups in the open spaces between the dwellings, not even deigning to take advantage of the scanty shade thrown by the huts.

Under the verandahs of the huts stood the wicker-work traps for catching fish, as well as roll upon roll of nets made from finely twisted bark string. The making and mending of these was the only occupation with which these primitive people really busied themselves, apart from fishing.

But their chief, Kolilo, Naju quickly discovered,

was a man of a widely different character to the rest of his villagers; for whilst they were happy and contented to live on in the same small circles, heedless of the world around them, he, on the other hand, was overburdened with the cares and responsibilities of his reign. Having waited so long for an opportunity to leave them all behind, he was now filled with impatience to be up and away. He hurried his people to such an extent over preparing the necessary foodstuffs, that early dawn on the second day saw the bales of dried fish, the sleeping-mats and cooking vessels lined up ready once more for the journey.

CHAPTER XII

The Magic Plains

At the head of the long column of men, as it wended its way in single file out of the village, marched Kolilo himself. Never before had he entertained so noble a guest, or even pictured to himself a retinue of such splendid slaves. As he stepped gaily along, and again and again turned to gaze at these big dusky warriors marching in the sunshine, he decided that the fates were indeed kind to have given him a chance to join this happy throng. As such an opportunity would surely never occur again, he determined at least to make the most of this one.

Either through intention or lack of knowledge, Kolilo had failed to tell Naju and his following where they were bound for or what lay beyond the stretch of swamp through which they must soon pass. Instead however of disturbing them this very uncertainty gave an even added zest to their joy at being once more heading for pastures new.

With Naju and Yidahonga beside him and the rest of the company close at his heels, Kolilo led the way across the broad foreshore. But here the deep sand merely laughed at their efforts to stride jauntily along, and for each step they took forward

with a loud protesting squeak the sand as often as not slid away beneath them.

Even though it meant the beginning of the vast swamp, on entering the raffia palm forest that covered it and that had from the start beckoned to the travellers with its promise of cool shade, their first feeling was one of thankfulness to be away from the scorching sand with its heat and glare. Although the swamp mud, when they reached it, came well above their knees, hour after hour they plodded slowly along, too fully occupied in keeping their balance or forcing a way between patches of stubborn papyrus stems to even find time to talk; so the only sounds that broke the eerie silence were shouts of laughter when one or other of their number stepped on the greasy, rotting stems of fallen palms and slid into the wine-coloured water, to rise again spluttering and choking with slimy water-weeds clinging to their bodies. The sun was well down towards the horizon when at last they reached a small patch of high ground, the first and only dry spot since entering the swamp.

"It is a poor enough place," said Kolilo to Naju; "nevertheless here we shall be obliged to spend the night, for there is no other dry ground until we reach the end of this swamp, some time after mid-day to-morrow."

On hearing these words the bearers gladly flung themselves down on the ground, for their bodies ached with the long tedious hours of wading. And so they lay for several moments, too utterly weary for words, whilst the flesh of their legs and feet throbbed and burnt; but to this they paid little

heed at the time, taking it to be merely an effect of the water. Instead of this irritation diminishing, however, as it ought to have done, it grew steadily worse and at last drove them to sit up and examine their nether members.

At the first glance their eyes widened with wonder, each turning to look at his neighbour's legs. But it was the same throughout the entire line of sitting bearers, for from the instep to the thighs of every man clung a host of lithe brown worms. Born and bred on the highlands, neither Naju or his following had even heard of leeches, much less seen one, so not knowing what to do, they simply sat and gaped speechlessly as the worms, with heads deeply embedded in the skin, they sucked out the blood, becoming every instant larger and larger.

But to calmly sit and do nothing was asking too much of any man, so firmly grasping the slippery bodies of the worms, with a quick twist they jerked them out. This was altogether too painful though, for each leech, as they soon found out, brought away a piece of skin with it.

The albino chief now came to the rescue, and having lived all his life by the side of the swamp and having encountered the little blood-suckers many times before, knew the only way out of the difficulty. Nevertheless out of curiosity to see what the strangers would do, he smilingly waited before doing so. Once Naju and his men knew the remedy it was easy enough to get rid of their tormentors, for one pinch of coarse salt sprinkled on their heads drew forth a convulsive wriggle from

the leeches and a moment afterwards they dropped to the ground. Unfortunately the leeches were only one amongst many evils that assailed the travellers that eventful day. A far greater one was the total lack of fires or light, for where in that waste of stagnant water could any reasonably dry wood be found? Then, again, the island itself was so small that any sort of movement was out of the question; only by keeping still, and sitting close together, could they hope to find room. While the daylight lasted all went well, for their bodies at least were left in peace; but as the darkness fell swarm upon swarm of mosquitos rose buzzing from the dank water in search of blood.

After eating a badly needed meal of smoked dried fish each chilled individual propped himself for warmth and support against his neighbour's back, and sought for a time at least to forget his troubles in sleep.

Other denizens of the swamp had something to say to this. It was an ancient bull frog, with his dull, booming croak, who struck the first notes of a chorus in which every other frog in the vicinity hastened to join. They croaked, squealed, hissed or piped, making the night ring with their noise. Not merely singing frogs, but jumping frogs, hairy frogs, clawed frogs, they gathered in thousands on that one small island, either to hop over the ground or take flying leaps from one side to the other, flopping into the faces of the sleepers as they passed or sprinkling them with cold stinking water.

The usually sluggish bearers needed no call to rouse them the following morning; they were, in

fact, anxiously awaiting the first grey glimmerings of dawn, when they rose and plodded stolidly after their leaders, each one determined in his own mind, come what might, to reach the end of that loathsome swamp before another night fell.

Only one short day spent in the company of the albino proved to Naju that he had acted wisely in allowing this man to join their ranks, for one thing was very certain, they could never have crossed this swamp without his guidance. How Kolilo contrived to find the way, without even a tree to guide him, through mile upon mile of tall swamp palms, all looking identically the same, was a mystery. The fact remained that he never once hesitated, but marched them confidently along.

When they came at last to the end of the swamp and the palms had all been left behind, the foolish bearers, who only the previous day had cried for shade, now danced and sang with joy to feel once more the hot rays of the sun scorching their chilled bodies and the warm solid ground again beneath their feet. Freed from the clogging weight of water that had so hampered their movements, they now marched through a land gay with tall clumps of purple mallows where the soft green grass was starred with rosy marsh flowers. Next they came to a country dotted over with tiny hills, between which little cold clear rivers flowed deep down in their grey and pink soapstone beds.

When they came to one such hill, out of whose side gushed a spring of water, Kolilo suddenly halted. "Take one good running leap clear over this," he warned Naju and Yidahonga behind him,

"for the water is boiling hot." Once safe on the other side, the three leaders waited, curious to see what the bearers would do.

With their noses in the air the first of the string of slaves arrived at the water's edge, and never having heard of such a thing as a boiling sulphur spring, several of them stepped boldly into it. So ridiculous was the expression of bewilderment on the faces of the men that the amused watchers shouted with laughter; but the rest of the column were not to be caught in this trap, so chopping down a small tree, they threw it across the stream, then walked safely over.

Very shortly after this, during a halt for the mid-day rest, Kolilo for the first time told Naju where they were going to and what kind of country lay before them.

"I quite understand," he droned in his soft, husky voice, "that you are anxious to know where we are going, but I purposely refrained from saying anything about it that you might more fully enjoy the pleasure in store. But as we are now drawing very near it is only fair to warn you all what to expect. Within a very short time the path we are following will bring us out on to a wide stretch of open country, so be prepared, for there you will see one of the most wonderful sights of your life.

"No," he said, in answer to a hail of questions, "I am not going to spoil the pleasure of the surprise by telling you what to expect but this much you may know: it has something to do with animals!" And with this scanty description both

Naju and his men had to content themselves, for not another word would Kolilo say.

Nevertheless as they marched on again through the hot golden sunshine every stunted tree or clump of bushes was carefully noted in the hope that it would turn out to be an antelope or a wild pig. But not even a rock rabbit flicked across the scene, until at last they came to the crest of a small rise. Then there remained no further reason to strain their eyes, for below them, stretching away to the horizon, lay the great plains and the wonderful sight of which Kolilo had spoken. And there they halted, both Prince and slaves, awed into silence by the immensity of the view before them and the vast concourse of animals collected there.

Outlined on every ant-hill or point of vantage stood the sentinel bulls, keeping watch and guard over the herds of soft-eyed does and their frisky calves. In the very forefront, a bare twenty paces away, a herd of eland passed slowly along, led by a lordly grey-blue bull whose long dewlap swayed from side to side as he walked. Following on their heels came a string of sable antelopes. The black satin-coated leader, vain in his great strength, held up the whole herd as he challenged one of the younger bulls to combat. But the sleek, velvety eyed does, weary with these daily battles between the lords of the herd, paid no heed but continued to munch the sweet dry grass.

Unable to tear themselves from this fascinating sight, Naju and his men sat for hours and hours watching the ever-shifting scene. Once five long

lean shapes stalked silently through the sunshine, passing close by the spot where a great bull water-buck grazed; but he, noble brute, knowing that the kings of the forest do not thus openly in the middle of the day hunt down their prey, never even raised his head to glance at them as they passed.

The time fled swiftly by, but so engrossed was Naju that he neither moved nor spoke, and for the first time in their lives his bearers forgot to be either hungry or thirsty. Left to themselves, in all probability the darkness would have fallen and found them in exactly the same spot and so miles away from the nearest water; but fortunately Kolilo was there to remind them of this vital fact. Noting that the day was already far spent, he raised his arm and pointed to a belt of trees showing as a mere blur across the plain.

"There," he said, "lies the nearest water-hole, and as you can see, it is still some hours distant. As the country is over-run with lions, and as a great deal of dry wood will be needed for the fires to-night, would it not be as well for us to start now and make our way across? Then there will be no reason to hurry, and you will gain a closer view of the animals as we pass through their midst."

As the latter part of this proposal was very much to the liking of every man, before he quite realised what was happening Kolilo found himself scurrying with the rest down the side of the ridge. Once arrived at the bottom of the incline, he picked out one of the many tracks made by the hoofs of the animals and again led the way.

As the column marched silently along, animals rose up from where they lay on either side of the path, and bounding a few paces away, stopped and turned to gaze at the intruders, whilst countless herds of chestnut hartebeeste, with their sloping hindquarters and long foolish faces, stood timidly bunched together, their large soft eyes filled with curiosity.

"In spite of their stupid appearance, however," explained Kolilo to Naju as they walked on side by side, "these buck are nevertheless the swiftest runners on the veldt and are the only animals that have ever been known to escape when pursued by a pack of hyæna dogs. But to realise what that means you must first know that these same dogs will for hours and hours, and sometimes even days, tirelessly race after their victim, until at last it becomes too weary to go another step and is then easily surrounded and torn to pieces."

Over these magic plains they went, and as far as the eye could reach, with glinting horns and stamping hoofs, feeding, fighting and playing, moved this vast world of animals. Scattered about in the short grass too lay the bleaching bones of many a stately buck who had died to feed the lions. In most cases very little but the skull and horns remained; for after the lions and vultures had taken their fill of the meat, then would come the other scavengers of the wild—the hyænas and jackals—to feast themselves on the bones and scraps of offal that were left.

It was a hungry, thirsty and weary crowd of men who at long last came to the belt of trees sur-

rounding the promised water-hole. With Kolilo's warning regarding the lions fresh in their minds they wasted no time, but hastily scattered whilst the daylight lasted to gather the logs for the fires. Then when the darkness fell it was to find the simple preparations complete and the pots containing the evening meal bubbling merrily, whilst over the camp hung a mingled smell of tobacco smoke, wood fires and the scent of the trees overhead.

Having eaten a hearty meal, the whole company sat or lounged around in the cheerful glow, ignorant of the fact that in the gloom beyond the circle of firelight long, lean shapes moved and peered, disturbed by the sound of voices and the taint of men. There was however one man present who could, had he chosen to do so, have warned Naju and his men what would very shortly take place, but for the second time that day Kolilo intentionally kept silent.

That for which he waited came at last—a lion's roar, loud and close at hand! Barely had the deep rattling breath ended and the last moan died away when there came an answer from another direction. After that the company around the fires sat upright, awed into silence by the thunderous chorus that broke out. For on all sides, far and near, lion after lion took up the challenge and roar followed roar until the very ground trembled with the volume of sound. Then, just as suddenly as it had arisen, the outburst died away, leaving a silence unbroken by even the rustle of a leaf and uncanny in its suddenness. The eyes of the startled

men peered out into the darkness, but not a shadow was seen to move. Then, to soothe their fears came the husky voice of the albino chief.

"It is useless striving to look," he said, "for already the great cats have satisfied their curiosity and moved away. I have visited these plains many times before, and know for a certainty that there is no danger, for the lions are never hungry and are therefore not man-eaters. As they are by now too fully occupied taking their toll of the herds to pay any further attention to us, we may as well prepare ourselves to go to sleep."

Fresh logs were drawn from the heaps of wood and thrown on to the fires; then, cheered by the bright blaze and comforted by the thought that there is always safety in numbers, the men lay down to sleep. Only the watchmen, whose duty it was to keep the fires burning, squatted, gazing into the red glow until at last the moon rose, flooding the plain with a cold white radiance. Then they too relaxed their vigilance and joined the band of sleepers, whilst the fires died down to heaps of red embers and the tall trees threw dark shadows over the sleeping place.

On what a scene to gladden the heart of every man did the sun rise the following morning! Near and far, let the eyes roam where they would, they rested only on moving shapes of animals, both large and small. Whilst the lords of the herd fought their battles, real and sham, the does and their calves pursued each other round and round. Then, again, whole herds of the fleet-footed creatures, led by the bulls, streaked across the

BEYOND THE CAMP FIRE.

Facing p. 224.

ground as if in fear of their lives, but this again was mere pretence, for their only enemies, the lions, had long ago taken themselves off back to their lairs to wait until the darkness fell again.

As it was fast becoming a matter of course for Kolilo to shoulder the responsibility and lead the way, when they started off again that day neither the slaves nor their leaders troubled themselves to inquire where they were going to, knowing perfectly well that Kolilo would tell them in his own good time. Even in so short a while this queer albino chief, with his ugly face, pale-skinned body and soft husky voice, had become as one of themselves, and proved himself to be a man of sound commonsense and one moreover who never talked unless he had something of importance to say. But what was stranger still, it dawned on Naju that for some unknown reason he really liked and trusted this extraordinary creature. Knowing him as they did, it was all the more surprising when, as he led them through the maze of animal tracks, Kolilo, all unasked, told Naju and Yidahonga what lay ahead.

"As I said that first day when we met by the lake," he began, "it has long been my ambition to take a journey and see something of the world outside my own village; but up to now I have never found the time to travel beyond these plains. Nevertheless from passing strangers I have gleaned many strange facts; whether they are true or not remains to be seen. However, this much is certain, that these game-haunted solitudes, wonderful

though they are, are as nothing compared to what we shall see later on.

"The place that we are heading for now is known to the local tribes by the name of Oldonjo, which means the 'Giant Volcanoes.' The middle and at the same time the largest of these volcanoes is called Ngoro Ngoro, and has been dead now for many thousands of years. If however only half the stories one hears about these highlands are true, then it is indeed a wonderland and well worth the many days of weary climbing it will take to reach it."

"Then let us go to Ngoro Ngoro," answered Naju, "for the hill is not formed that these strong-legged slaves of mine cannot climb with ease, for they hail from a land that is nothing else from end to end but one mighty mountain chain after another. As you say you know and understand this part of the country so well," Naju continued, "perhaps you can answer a question that has puzzled me greatly from the first moment I set eyes on these magic plains. Has it ever occurred to you to wonder why all these many thousands of animals choose to live herded together in this one particular spot?"

"Ah, you are not the only man who has asked himself that question," answered Kolilo, "and as far as I know there is only one reason; but that you shall see for yourself within a very short time."

The end of another long march found them standing by the side of a wide, shallow pool of water. Lying as this did in the midst of this flat,

sun-scorched plain, it was cause enough in itself for wonder, but added to that the edges of the pool and the crevices between the flat rocks surrounding it were encrusted with white powdery grains which glistened like snow in the sunshine. As neither Naju nor his following had ever seen anything like it before, they at once turned to Kolilo for an explanation.

"That," he answered, "is nothing more nor less than salt!"

"But where does it come from?" was the next question asked.

"It comes out of the water, for the source of this pool is a spring bubbling straight up out of the ground. In the centre, where you see the ripples, it is very deep, but the edges are so shallow that the sun easily evaporates the water, leaving only the dry grains. As all the people of my tribe fetch their salt from these pans, I know it to be the purest and best, so do not fear, but take my advice and collect as much of it as you can carry."

Not however until they had actually tasted it could Naju's men bring themselves to believe in this miracle, for in their own land salt was indeed a luxury and only to be obtained in very small quantities either from the ashes left after burning green water-weeds or by evaporating saline mud taken from the marshes; but having once convinced themselves, they needed no second invitation.

Whilst the slaves busied themselves scooping up the salt the three leaders stood talking together.

"To me," mused Kolilo, "the many trampled

tracks leading through and around these salt pans tell their own tale, and here, I believe, lies the answer to the question why all these animals congregate here.

"Once many years ago, together with some of my men, I slept near this spot, and shall never forget the sight that greeted my eyes on awaking in the very early dawn. For on every side, look where we would, countless herds of buck surged and crowded, some of them so close that by stretching out a hand it was easy to touch them. Rising to my feet, I passed through their midst, but they were so engrossed in licking up the salt that they paid no heed.

"Ever since that day it has pleased me to imagine that away back in the early ages the very first of the herds came to drink at this pool, and having by chance tasted the little white grains, they have stayed nearby ever since."

By the time the albino had finished his tale the rest of the company were ready for the journey once more. It was an occasion not to be missed; so apart from the cooking-pots every other vessel was filled to the brim; the bearers also tied up bundles of salt in leaves and slung them around their necks and waists.

From the time they left the salt pans nothing further occurred to hinder them, so day after day they forged steadily on; and if sun-scorched bodies and blistered feet drove them at times to think longingly of their own fresh mountain air and cool flowing streams, they were too brave to utter a single complaint.

More often than not too the liquid in the widely scattered water-holes was nothing else but trampled mud; nevertheless parched lips eagerly sucked up the fluid, and when at night, from every direction, herds of thirsty animals came to the drinking places, they paused, startled and dismayed at the twinkling fires and the sleeping men clustered around them.

CHAPTER XIII

Oldonjo, the Giant Volcanoes

THERE followed many long days of monotonous marching through the brown shrub before Naju and his following came at last to the far edge of the low-lying plains. Now rising tier upon tier before them stretched the foot-hills of the Giant Volcanoes. But of their summits no sign was visible, for they towered away into the skies and were hidden in banks of white cloud.

Such a venture as the one they were about to undertake might well have daunted the stoutest heart, but Naju's slaves had long ago forgotten what fear was. Even when Kolilo jokingly warned them that in all probability they would die of hunger or thirst or fall into the hands of hostile tribes, they merely laughed, pointing to their leader.

"It is enough for us that he wishes to go," was all he could draw from them.

When first Kolilo had mentioned the word volcanoes it had at once brought to the minds of the bearers fields of sharp, jagged lava, with bruised feet and cut toes. Up to the present however they found no such thing, but only a tiny track leading up over the slopes with loose rocks and boulders strewn around, that it was easy to step over, or avoid altogether.

Before many hours had passed though, they

were destined to find that there are other and even worse evils than lava; but in the meantime they strode blithely after their leaders, paying but scant heed to the low sparse thorn shrub that covered the mountain sides and scratched their legs and ankles as they went.

The first note of warning of the hardships ahead was struck when they came to a succession of deep ravines, whose steep sides were thickly clad with high spreading thorn bushes. Although it is easy enough when armed with a long knife to cut through the trailing branches of a thorn bush, it is quite another matter to clear them out of the way with naked hands, and when closely hemmed in with other bushes.

The work was accomplished at last, but only after hours of patient toil. Then, scratched and bleeding but undaunted, that stout band of warriors came safely out on the far side of the last thorn-clad ravine.

But they had only overcome one difficulty to find themselves faced by another, for up the hills ahead stretched a forest of tall spreading mimosa trees.

It little mattered that the quivering branches overhead were laden with beautiful, downy white rich-scented blossoms, around which the bees and butterflies hummed merrily. Of far greater importance in their eyes was the carpet of long needle-like thorns covering the ground so thickly, and almost barring progress to unprotected feet.

Nevertheless painful though it was, they had to push forward, and as it is always those in advance who pick up all the thorns, there was a decided

eagerness on the part of each man to let his neighbour march ahead.

Mid-day presently found them perspiring and weary with the long upward toil through the mimosa forest, and thankful when their leader called a halt. Picking out a shady spot, with the idea of taking a rest, they proceeded to scrape and sweep it clean of thorns, quite ignorant of the fact, until later, that only a few paces away an old female rhinoceros stood fast asleep, buried in a canopy of mimosa and knee-deep in spicy cardamums.

The sound of voices meant nothing to this great beast, and it was only when the wind carried a warning taint to her nostrils that she woke up to the fact that all was not right.

Living alone, unharmed and unmolested, it was difficult to understand why the smell of men made her very angry; but there was no doubt that it did so, for with her front hoofs she stamped furiously on the ground and at the same time uttered a thin clacking cry.

Hearing this, but taking it to be the call of some wild bird, and all unconscious of the fact that they were being challenged, Naju and his men at first paid no heed. It was a different matter though when the sound of heavy hoofs drew nearer and nearer, until a grey unwieldy body thrust itself into sight between the trees.

There was only one thing to do, and the bearers did it. Thorn trees or no thorn trees, it was all the same to them; up they clambered to the topmost branches, and from there gazed down at their attacker.

In the first place, it was a very foolish thing for the rhinoceros to attack a big crowd of men in such a reckless manner, and the result was exactly what might be expected, for once in their midst the few wits the beast possessed fled, giving place to a longing to be safely away again. With this thought only in her head, she galloped on a few paces and in so doing passed within spear's length of the place where Naju stood with Yidahonga and Kolilo. Then, through shortsightedness being unable to see the trunk of a tree near by, she crashed into it with such force that she rolled head over heels.

Unhurt, but badly frightened, the animal squealed shrilly, struggled to her feet, and thundered off down the hill.

Waiting until the sound of the retreating rhinoceros had at last died away, the bearers came down from their lofty perches.

They were quite unaware that there was anything unusual in their behaviour, for when an angry animal charges suddenly down upon you, is it not after all the wisest plan to climb out of its reach? So chattering noisily amongst themselves, they gathered up their various belongings and started off anew.

On and ever upward they went until at last the great mimosa thorn forest ended, giving place to a sea of tall elephant grass. On every side the land rose and fell, and then rose again, whilst up the hills and down in the ravines waved one unbroken field of yellow.

Here even the intrepid leader of that brave band

might well pause aghast, for how would it ever be possible to force a path through these regiments of tough stems, growing as close together as the hairs on one's head and three times the height of a man.

As it never entered Naju's head to leave to others the seemingly impossible tasks of life, he himself now shouldered the responsibility and led the way. With neither tracks of man nor beast to guide him, step by step he forced a path up and down hill after hill.

It was not long before Naju and his men became parched with thirst, footsore and weary; but they plodded doggedly on, all knowing well that water must be found before they could even dream of resting.

The sun dropped lower and lower, and at last sank behind the mountains, but only to find them still slowly climbing. They were now however no longer obliged to force a way for themselves through the stubborn canes, for after a time they found the grass trampled and broken, and wide game paths cut through it in every direction.

To understanding eyes the deep three-toed hoof-marks outlining the numberless tracks told their own tale, for here was a veritable city of rhinoceroses.

Immediately the spirits of the jaded men rose with a bound, for the existence of these animals meant water somewhere near at hand, if they could only find it. With renewed hope they hurried on through the dusky, short-lived twilight; but when the darkness fell they were following the same

twisting paths and still no sign of the eagerly-hoped-for water.

Seeing that many of the weaker slaves were by this time lagging behind, too utterly weary and overcome by thirst to keep up with the main column, Naju decided that the time had come to call a halt. One by one the men slowly came in, but not until the very last of them had appeared did he too stretch himself down on the ground and very soon fell asleep.

From then onwards not a man amongst the sleepers stirred, and the cold night hours sped swiftly by. Even when the stars faded at the coming of the dawn, only one man amongst the number awoke, and that was the albino, Kolilo.

Seated in the midst of the huddled shapes, this one man silently watched the daybreak give place to glowing sunrise, whilst all around the birds twittered noisily and the harsh, grating call of a partridge sounded on the still morning air.

At first he paid but little heed, and only listened idly to these sounds; but finally the significance of them dawned on him. Rising softly to his feet, he stepped over the sleepers and went silently forward along one of the well-trodden tracks, and on coming to a tall tree he quickly swarmed up its knotted trunk until he reached the highest branches, and from there peered eagerly around. After some seconds had passed his face lit up with a triumphant smile, and clambering quickly down, he hurried back to the sleeping place, where he snatched up an empty calabash and again went off. Some minutes elapsed before Kolilo came back,

but this time he stayed quietly hidden on the edge of the tall grass-stems that surrounded his sleeping companions.

A watcher would now have seen the albino's wide mouth curve in a grin, and the small pink eyes twinkle merrily as he poured some of the water from the calabash he held into his hand and flung it over the sleeping men.

At first they never moved, but as one cold shower followed another the men—some of them with loud shouts of astonishment—awoke and, sitting up, gazed around with bewildered eyes. Each man, seeing the streams of water trickling down his body, turned and look reproachfully at his neighbour, but yet another shower of cold drops decided them that it came from another source, so springing to their feet they searched for the culprit.

Kolilo was quickly discovered and laughingly dragged from his hiding-place. He was then surrounded by a crowd of excited men who demanded to know where and how he had discovered the precious water.

"We owe it all to the birds," he answered, "for it was their noisy twittering at dawn this morning that led me to think there must be water somewhere near at hand, so I climbed a tree and found it a bare forty paces away.

"But do not for a moment picture to yourselves a clear sparkling stream," he warned then, "for there is only one small hole and that but half-full of water, and I fear, judging by its muddy state, that the same animals who drink there more often than not bathe in it as well."

After going without water for a whole day and night, the thirsty slaves quickly threw themselves down on the edge of the mud-hole and greedily drank the thick muddy liquid, after which they hastened to fill the calabashes for that day's needs, finally using up the remainder of the water to cook a meal of smoked dried meat. This done, they then set off on their journey once more.

As compared with what had gone before, the travelling for the next two or three days was mere child's play. For even though it meant a longer way round, it was by far easier to follow the smooth, winding animal tracks than to strike a way through the tall grass to the hilltops. Although they never actually came face to face with any of the beasts themselves, many a time when passing through belts of trees hoarse angry grunts followed by the well-known clacking cry warned the laggards of the party what might happen if they loitered too far behind.

The footmarks of other and by far larger mammals now began to mingle with those of the rhinoceros, whilst the torn, broken and uprooted trees spoke of the vast herds of elephants who also lived in that high wind-swept region ; but they too stayed securely hidden in the sea of tall grass. Only at odd times thick grey snake-like trunks were to be seen curling up into the trees to pick the fruits hanging there.

As it turned out later however our band of adventurers were fated, and that through no fault of their own, to fall foul of the lords of the forest and to suffer a terrible defeat.

It was all brought about by the love of solitude—of being by themselves—possessed by the two pygmy trackers Amani and Amisi.

One day at noon, after a long march, our wanderers came to a swiftly flowing mountain stream, where the whole band sat down to rest and bathe their cut and bleeding feet. Amani and Amisi however must needs wander away by themselves to search for wild honey. Without thought for the danger they might be incurring, they crossed a wide open glade and entered a thick belt of trees on the opposite side. The habits of these quaint creatures were too well known by this time to cause any comment, and although Naju and his men watched them go, little heed was paid to their departure. It was but a few seconds afterwards however that a great commotion arose.

Looking towards the sound, Naju and his followers saw a sight that froze the blood in their veins, for flying over the ground, for all the world like two small brown birds, came the pygmies, and at their heels followed a herd of female elephants and their calves. Straight for the spot where their comrades sat came the terrified pygmies, with their pursuers close behind. Long before the panic-stricken men had time to recover their senses and flee to a place of safety, it was already too late, for even as the bearers rose the herd were already amongst them, and the trumpeting of the angry beasts mingling with the screams of the terrified men.

The first to fall a victim to the fury of the elephants was the albino chief Kolilo; for, as he

THE WRATH OF THE ELEPHANTS.

Facing p. 238.

dived to a place of safety, he stumbled and fell over a root right in the path of a gaunt old mother elephant who, catching him with her trunk, whirled him round and round, dashing his body on the ground and against the trees, then finally hurled him many paces away, where he fell and lay a crumpled heap on the ground.

Again and again Naju sought to go to the rescue of his men, but it was as futile for one man to try and drive this mob of infuriated animals away as to stem a river in flood by throwing a log across it. All around him surged their great forms as they sought to trample their victims underfoot or to tear them to pieces.

But Naju stood his ground, and at last the opportunity came to strike a blow, for one of the elephants broke away from the rest of the herd and came charging straight towards him. Drawing his body back, he waited, then as the animal drew near the heavy spear flew through the air and buried itself in the broad chest.

Squealing with pain, the wounded creature staggered, then swinging round, plunged away. Fearing that it would escape him altogether, Naju now quickly drew the long double-edged hunting-knife out of his girdle and set off in pursuit. His lithe strong limbs soon brought him within reach of the lumbering beast ahead, and stooping, he slashed with all his might at one of its legs, severing the tendons with the blow. The beast, now ham-strung, tottered on for a few more paces then sank bellowing to its knees, and finally, after several more spear thrusts, rolled over dead.

Waiting only to recover his spear, Naju now turned and sped back again, to find that the elephants had tired of their wrath and taken themselves clean away; so he rallied the remainder of his following and set them the sad task of searching for the dead and dying.

First with heavy hearts the bearers sought their dead comrades, whose broken bodies when found were laid ready for burial.

Next they stood grouped in a silent circle around a formless shape of flesh and bone—all that remained of the albino chief. The tears rolled unchecked down the cheeks of these simple savages at the thought that the squat, pale-hued figure would never again march bravely at the head of their ranks or sit in their midst around the twinkling night fires. Death itself held no terrors for them, and in their own minds they were convinced that the departing spirit was already speeding on its way to join those of its forefathers in the spirit-world. It was the realisation of their own sad loss that made them weep, and the thought that the soft husky voice would never again tell them of the years of patient waiting that had passed before the long hoped for opportunity had come, and Kolilo had been able to leave behind him the cares and trials of chieftainship and set out to taste the joys of freedom and revel in the beauties of the world around him.

And now the end of it all was a rude death and a shallow grave in these lofty, lonely mountains. No wonder these men wept, as with their hunting-

knives—the only implements at their disposal—they dug the graves for their friends.

They laid Kolilo with his head towards the land of his birth, and buried the other poor victims of the elephants' wrath in a close circle around him.

Next they gathered many stones and boulders and built a tall pile to mark the spot, and at the same time to guard the sleepers beneath from the depredations of the slinking hyænas—those dread enemies of lonely graves.

A careful search of the surrounding undergrowth brought forth the spears, hunting-knives, calabash drinking-cups and carved snuff-boxes of the dead men, and these too were brought and laid on the top of the pyramid of stones.

Mingling with the others, as at last they made their way sadly from the spot, went two small grey-faced pygmies, for they were amongst the very first who had crept from between the undergrowth at the sound of their master's voice.

Let me tell you that it took these two little men many days to recover from their share in this last most unhappy event. They were too sad even to talk about it, and the most cunningly placed questions—as to how they had contrived to infuriate the elephants—always drew forth the same reply:

"We only went to search for wild honey, and instead we found the birthplace of the lords of the forest!"

Remembering the number of fat podgy calves who had accompanied the herd of elephants in their mad rush, none doubted the truth of this statement, and certain it was that not the most tempting

bribe under the sun would have induced one of the party to venture to the place to find out for himself.

Before they started off again, two whole days were spent in cutting up the one dead elephant and drying the meat. From dawn until sunset the work went on, and the men—their bodies smeared with blood—staggered across to the fires and hung the meat in crimson rows over the blaze. Scores of vultures, too, came to join the feast; they gathered like magic from out of the blue void above, and circling, hovered in a dark cloud over the spot, to settle on the nearest trees, watching and waiting grimly until their turn should come.

Then with the darkness came the other carrion of the wild—the jackals and hyænas—each intent on filching from the other a share of the dead elephant.

* * * * *

The courage and endurance of this youthful Prince were truly something to marvel at. Even now with more than half of his following slain through one cause or another, he never faltered in his determination to reach the Giant Volcanoes. Doggedly he pressed on over the barren and stony slopes where the only herbage was the tough grey thorny cactus. Undaunted he led the way on across endless rocky ravines, beneath overhanging precipices, and through forests of tall stinging-nettles. Then after days of ceaseless marching, with only the dried elephant meat for food and the filthy liquid in the mud-holes to drink, came the reward for his endurance.

Having passed through the barren lands, the way now led through beautiful alpine meadows, where on every side grew giant heathers with branches as thick as a man's arm and hung with waving lichens. The ground beneath their feet too was carpeted with soft pink and green mosses, and the tall flower-laden stems of the lobelias reared themselves high in the air.

These meadows in turn gave place to hill pastures where every slope was clothed with scented flowering bushes and the wild thyme filled the air with sweet fragrance, until at last a day dawned when they stood on the brink of a wide far-reaching moor, on the far side of which rose the volcanoes they had come so far to see—the very roof of the world it might well be!

First one and then another of the men dragged themselves wearily up the last slope, to stand spell-bound at the wonderful scene that unfolded itself before them. There they clustered together, awed into silence, and gazed with wondering eyes at the vast circle of cliffs that had at one time held within its centre a steaming sea of lava.

Standing sentinel-wise over this Father of all the Volcanoes, loomed other and smaller craters, joined together by numberless peaks and ridges whose tips were crowned with tall swaying cedar forests and the sides clothed with tangled bamboo. Standing aloof from the rest, at the head of a valley plastered with volcanic mud, a beautiful mountain thrust its massive yet tapering form upwards in one glowing pink, white and grey pyramid, whilst a thin film of vapour rising out of the centre proclaimed it

to be the one live volcano amongst this land of dead giants.

Banking thunder-clouds caught by the sun's rays drifted across the scene or hung poised over other craters, as if they sought to again draw fire from their long dead throats.

Having gazed their fill at these distant wonders, Naju and his men now had time to look about them and to take in the details of the plateau upon which they stood. It was then that they all but shouted aloud with astonishment at the sight that met their eyes, for scattered about over the flat surface grazed innumerable herds of cattle. Not even a hundred paces away from where they stood was a sleek herd feeding placidly in a wide circle, whilst three dusky herdsmen leant on their tall staffs, calmly regarding the strangers. If the ground at their feet had suddenly opened, Naju and his following could not well have been more astonished, for this was the last thing in the world they had hoped to find in such a wild and inaccessible region.

It was a very difficult problem to know how to act next, for if the men watching them with such interest belonged to a hostile tribe, then one false move might mean death or captivity for all.

Naju hurriedly turned the question over in his mind, but long before he had come to a decision it was already answered for him in a very unexpected manner, for stalking rapidly towards them, in between the cattle, came a score or more of tall men.

Following their leader's example, Naju's slaves never moved but stood watching the new-comers'

approach with curious eyes. On they came, and then, when within a few paces, the whole bunch halted and their leader, stooping down, snatched up a handful of grass and waved it aloft. Instantly the grave expression faded from Naju's face, giving place to a smile of relief whilst his followers grinned broadly, for although it was many a day since they had last seen that waving aloft of a bunch of grass, they knew it too well ever to forget it, for it was a sign used by the great Mutuzi chiefs themselves and meant "we come in peace."

Here was another mystery, for how came it that these strangers knew of this sign? However there was no time left them to wonder, for already the new-comers were drawing near. The same man who had given the sign of peace stepped forward a pace in front of the others and stood facing Naju; but for a time neither of them spoke, for they were too engrossed in looking at each other.

"It is very strange indeed, but whatever tribe these men belong to they closely resemble my own people," thought Naju as he gazed at the tall, proud, calm figure of the chief confronting him, with its sharply-cut features and wide-set eyes. He then turned to look at the rest of the band, his eyes lingering with pleasure on the tall, broad-shouldered warriors, with their satiny skins, smooth-shaven faces and high cheek bones. His trained eye quickly took in the splendid weapons with which they were armed, for each man carried a long gleaming metal spear and a big tough hide shield, as well as a double-edged hunting-knife and a wooden club thrust carelessly into his girdle.

They were all clad alike in a scanty strip of soft material, knotted on the right shoulder and falling in loose folds around their loins.

Without exception the lobes of the ears of every man were pierced and stretched until they dangled on their shoulders, whilst their thick crisp hair was woven into two plaits, one short one which lay on their foreheads and another long one which hung to well below their waists. Both hair and loincloth were alike stained red with the vivid dye of camwood. It was only later that Naju was to learn the importance of these two pigtails and the part they played in the lives of these men.

Meanwhile the leader of the band having taken a thoroughly good look at the bearers, now spoke for the first time. As the deep strong voice fell on his ears Naju listened amazed, for instead of the clipped gutteral Swahili words used by the rest of the tribes when talking to strangers, this man spoke the same soft slurring language of his own people. Truly it was a day of mysteries, and later he would try to find out the meaning of it all. Meanwhile he listened carefully.

"You must pardon us if our sudden appearance startles you," said the chief, "but it is so rarely that we see a fresh face in this out-of-the-way place that as soon as the herdsmen brought us word of your arrival we came at once.

"I perceive that you are men of a different tribe to our own," he continued, "and I know not what your object is; but if, as I imagine, you have come up from the plains below, then both you and

your slaves must indeed be weary and hungry, for it is a long and terrible journey."

"No," answered Naju, "we come from a country that lies far beyond the plains you speak of. Our motive however is a peaceful one, for although it may sound unbelievable to you we are here simply and solely to see these world-old craters."

"Then," answered the chief, "in the name of the tribe who inhabit these highlands, I bid you welcome and offer for your acceptance the poor hospitality of our tribe."

Without even waiting for an answer one way or the other, he turned, and with Naju by his side and the rest at his heels, strode back the way he had come. On reaching the entrance to a wide kraal, with a wave of his hand he invited them to enter.

Once inside, Naju and his men paused and glanced around, for to them it seemed impossible that the place in which they stood could really be the home of these tall proud warriors, for the enclosure was a cattle kraal pure and simple, with a high stockade of thorns around it. Rows of tiny dwellings, built of plastered mud and cowdung, clustered tightly around the sides, whilst the centre space between and in front of the huts was a trampled mass of mud and manure

There could be no doubt however that this was the case, for crawling on their hands and knees out of the low doorways to look at the strangers came the wives and families of their hosts.

"Here again is the same curious likeness to our own women," thought Naju, as he gazed at the

rows of tall slim women with their beautiful faces. But when he came to know them better, he realised that there was a vast difference between the gentle, soft-eyed Mutuzi ladies; living always in strict seclusion, and these noisy, happy women with their necks adorned with heavy collars of metal wire and their legs and arms laden with jangling ornaments.

Clapping his hands briskly, the chief ordered food and water for his guests, whereupon the women dived back into the huts and emerged again carrying deep earthenware vessels which they set down in front of the famished men.

The bearers at least needed no second bidding, but dipping their hands into the pots, brought them out sticky with a mess of rich curdled milk.

CHAPTER XIV

Ngoro Ngoro, the Father of all the Craters

Week after week now slipped quickly by, and still our young Prince lingered happily with the hospitable and simple Māsai, and as he learnt to know them better, so his admiration for this stalwart and hardy race increased.

Each night after sunset, when the herds had been driven into the kraals and the entrance blocked with thorns, he took his place in the middle of a wide circle of men, where, seated on the ground, he listened to the tales they had to tell.

It was here that he learnt the reason why these people spoke the Mutuzi language and altogether so strongly resembled his own tribe. For they too were the descendants of a race of men who had in the long ago been driven from their own land—the marshy banks of the Blue Nile. Taking with them their flocks and herds, they had travelled through the land for many moons, until at last they came to these lofty highlands, and there, secure from strange and warlike tribes, they had lived for many generations.

During all this time their flocks and herds had increased to such an extent that the poorest men of the tribe now owned several thousand head of cattle. These same herds meant life itself to the

Māsai, for they cultivated no crops, but lived solely on milk and the blood drawn from the veins of the steers. Meat however of any kind they scorned, and even when the bulls of the herds fought and killed each other, the carcases were left lying where they fell until the vultures and hyænas made away with them.

These men lived solely for, and gave up their lives to, their cattle, and the only homes they built were the tiny dwellings in the middle of the cattle kraals. When water became scarce or the pasture eaten off, women and men loaded up their scanty belongings on to the pack steers and away they trekked to new feeding-grounds.

Day by day, whilst his slaves recovered from their long climb, Naju, attended by Yidahonga, went with Kama the chief to visit the surrounding kraals, and in all of them found the same hospitable, simple people.

Every kraal was under the rule of a separate chief, whose word was law, but as his subjects were neither greedy, malicious nor ambitious, he was little more than a figurehead. The really important men of the tribe however were the *morans*, or lion-hunters. Every kraal possessed its own band of these fearless warriors, and it was these men whose handsome bodies and splendid weapons had so aroused Naju's admiration when he first saw them.

Naju soon found out that these braves were more than worthy of their title of lion-hunters, for they treated the King of Beasts with the utmost scorn. Rarely a day passed without word being

brought in by a herdsman to say that one or more lions had either attacked the cattle or been seen slinking about on the outskirts of the herd. Then it was that without a word the morans would file silently forth and go with the man until he pointed out to them where the lions had last been seen. Next, taking up the spoor, they followed it relentlessly, and if the quarry slunk into the undergrowth and sought to hide, then with sticks and stones they drove him out, or if he escaped into a cave or burrow, one of their number would sit day and night at the entrance, never leaving it until the beast was driven by hunger and thirst to come out.

Then came the true test of warriorship, for if the moran on guard, through fear or any other cause, failed to spear the lion or prevent its escape, he was branded as a coward in the eyes of the tribe; the oldest moran, taking his spear, would then cut off the transgressor's two pigtails.

But this thing rarely if ever happened, for these men would have risked a score of lives, had they possessed them, rather than suffer the degradation of being called coward, even for a day.

Leaving his slaves behind, many a time Naju went to hunt lions with the morans, and his daring was as great as theirs. These tall strong warriors became his inseparable companions, and delighted in leading him all over the country, pointing out what they considered worthy of his notice.

Setting forth at sunrise, they rarely returned until time for the evening meal, and as these highlands teemed with bird and animal life, they passed

from one wonder to another the whole day through. Sometimes they paused to watch a herd of timid, spotted giraffe, which, startled by the approach of man, would amble away to the nearest cover, and then with their heads protruding above the tree tops and their legs showing beneath the lower branches, would gaze at the intruders.

As the Māsai never hunt or kill the game about them, the countless herds of zebras and antelopes paid no heed to the passage of the tall figures through their midst. The great black bull gnus, with swishing manes and waving tails, fought and played undisturbed.

Nor was the reason why this vast concourse of animals lived and grew fat on these uplands far to seek, for the pasture was one close mat of succulent white and red clover, growing knee-deep in a solid mass of green on the rich volcanic soil.

To be seen from afar were many shallow lakes gleaming like sheets of silver, and in the sedge and marshes surrounding them lived numberless kinds of waterfowl. Round the nearest of these lakes snowy-white, slim-legged egrets peered about amongst the reeds for food, and ever and anon flocks of graceful, golden-crested cranes rose in the air and sailed away. Then again droves of flamingoes threw a great splash of rosy shadow around them as they fed through the water, and stately giant turkeys strode along the sand, whilst long-legged, thin-necked ostriches ceaselessly searched the ground nearby for land shells and locusts.

Although the Māsai gladly led Naju from end to end of their land, told him every detail of their history, both past and present, and moreover gave him a share even in the ordering of the affairs of the tribe, there was just one precious secret that for many weeks they kept hidden from their guest, and that was the existence of a white boy in their midst.

It was however merely fear for the safety of this youth himself that kept them silent—waiting until they could learn everything there was to know about the stranger who had appeared so mysteriously amongst them.

Although Naju never wearied of hearing his new friends talk, they on the other hand found it well-nigh impossible to persuade him to speak of himself. His slaves however liked nothing better than to talk about their intrepid leader, and they eagerly answered the questions put to them as to who he was and where he came from.

The chief Kama himself, the lion-hunters, and even the women and children, listened repeatedly and with never-failing interest to the oft-told story of Naju's wonderful journey from the time he set out from Dungundega's kingdom until his arrival in these lofty highlands. So from this they came to know that the tall, handsome, youthful stranger, living so contentedly amongst them, was the true-blooded son of a great king.

As time went on, tales of our Prince's fame and prowess spread rapidly from kraal to kraal, and throughout the whole tribe there arose a feeling of regret that some day he would have to go away

again. The people tried to think of a way of keeping him amongst them, but, beyond cattle or wives, they possessed nothing of sufficient value with which to tempt him.

Then one day, as Kama, the chief of the kraal, sat listening to some of the stirring tales told by the bearers, the germ of an idea took shape in his mind. He decided however that for the present it would be wiser to say nothing about it to his own people, but to wait until he had talked the matter over with the other chiefs. So one morning saw him setting forth on a round of visits, but attended only by some of his young sons.

No sooner was the chief safely out of the way than the morans, now in charge of the kraal, proceeded to carry out a little plan of their own, for in their own minds they had long since decided that the time was ripe to tell their new-found friend of the white boy's existence.

First they gathered together to hold a little council amongst themselves as to when and how it would be best to break this important item of news to Naju. It turned out to be a simple matter, and they soon had a plan, and as a result of which some few hours later the morans were to be seen leading Naju up to the rim of Ngoro Ngoro itself, the middle and at the same time the greatest of all the craters.

As they climbed slowly first through the belts of tangled bamboo and on to the cedar forests lining the slopes, Naju speculated to himself as to what had occurred to suddenly induce the morans, all of their own free will, to offer to show him the

inside of this crater. For although he had many times before, when setting out on their daily excursions, hinted that he would like to go that way, his companions, without actually refusing, had always contrived to lead him in another direction.

Concluding that it was owing to some superstitious reason that they were unable to fall in with his wishes, and not wishing to appear discourteous to such kind and generous hosts, he had let the matter rest on those other occasions. However nothing of the kind now seemed to exist, for presently the warriors left the forest-clad slopes and glades behind them and came out on the very top of the lip of the giant crater, where they stood on an eminence—a veritable edge of the world—and gazed down into a chasm so vast that Naju held his breath with wonder.

In front of him now stretched one unbroken ring of precipitous cliffs that circled away, blue and misty, on either hand. Beneath him lay the wide-spreading floor of the crater, now forest-clad or grass-grown, whilst down the steep cliffs on the far side tumbled a mighty river—a broad silver ribbon at this distance—which gathered its waters into a wide lake, blue and gleaming in a setting of green marshes. But the sight of all others that claimed Naju's attention was the vast concourse of animals collected within this giant ring-fence, for elephants, zebras, ostriches and antelopes were herded together in scores of thousands.

Beautiful though it undoubtedly was, neither the crater nor its four-footed inhabitants were the real

reason why the morans had brought Naju to this spot. Nevertheless they waited patiently, leaning on their spears, until he had gazed his fill at all the wonders in turn. Then only did the eldest man of the band step to his side.

"Pardon me, O Prince," he began, "if I disturb your thoughts, but it is for no idle reason that I do so. To-day, when we set out to lead you to this spot it was with a definite purpose in our minds. You may have wondered why we have never consented to bring you here before; well, the real reason is that in this crater dwells a being who is very precious to us.

"But that you may fully understand how this comes about, I will begin at the beginning and tell you the story.

"Many years ago, when our fathers were still young, there arrived in this country a pale-skinned man and his wife who had come from another land, far across the big water, to bring us word of a strange god.

"Although only a few of our people were ever brought to believe in his teaching, still he stayed amongst us, and if you look carefully at the patch of forest by the edge of the lake on the crater floor, there you will see the brown roof of a dwelling. Well, that is the house the pale face built for himself, and there he lived for many years.

"Our people grew to know him as a brave and fearless man, and to love him as a friend, for he was skilled in the use of medicines and ever ready to minister to the sick or offer wise council to our chiefs.

"Then one day the wife of this man gave birth to a child. A messenger was quickly sent to all the big chiefs throughout the tribe carrying the news, and inviting them to come and see this infant for themselves.

"When all the chiefs and elders arrived and were gathered together then the white man passed the child to each in turn bidding them look upon him as a true son of the tribe, and consider by what name he should be called.

"As the tender white creature lay in their arms they saw that its head was covered with hair as golden as the sunbeams and its eyes were as blue as the skies, and for that reason they named him Sandwana.

"Some months after the birth of this child a great sickness broke out amongst us and the people died in thousands. Both the white man and his wife were amongst the first to take the sickness, but before the white man died he sent for the chiefs again and earnestly confided his little son into their keeping.

"For the man's own sake, and because the youth himself had grown very dear to them, they gladly accepted the charge and from that time until now Sandwana has lived in his father's house, carefully guarded and watched over by the whole tribe.

"Being always afraid that harm should come to him is the reason why we waited until now to find out what kind of man you were before telling you of this boy's existence."

"Well, now that you have told me," answered

Naju, "it is only to be expected that I am very curious to see this white boy that you speak of for myself, so will you not lead the way down to his dwelling?"

"I would willingly take you there," answered the moran, "but it would be useless, for at the present time Sandwana is away on a visit to some of the other kraals, but there is no doubt that you will see him and that too before very long."

Neither Naju nor his companions however guessed how soon, or in what manner this prediction was to be fulfilled, as they turned and made their way down the outer sides of the crater and across the wide plateau back to the village.

Many days had now passed since Kama, the chief, had set off to carry out his plan, and no news had been heard of him since. But early one morning, without a word of warning, Kama returned, and with him came fully a thousand of the biggest and most important chiefs of the tribe, each attended by his following of morans and tribesmen.

Wondering to himself what such a large gathering portended and what important celebration was about to take place, Naju stood with Yidahonga near the entrance of the kraal and watched the crowd as it flocked in. Each of the chiefs as he passed paused for a second to offer Naju a solemn greeting before moving aside to make room for the next comer.

So great was the crowd in fact, that the enclosure was quickly packed from end to end until there

was barely room left for a child to pass through, whilst beyond the thorn barrier surged another throng of people nearly as great.

The sight of a big gathering of Māsai never failed to please Naju, and to-day there was even an added reason why it should do so, for although the chiefs themselves were simply clad in their long skin cloaks, the morans on the other hand were gaily bedecked with paint and feathers.

Around the heads, and stuck in the girdles of every sable warrior, tall curly white and black ostrich plumes waved in the breeze, and their cow-hide shields and loincloths glowed crimson, whilst the tall brightly burnished spears gleamed in the sunshine. Then too mingling with the low hum of voices, as the men talked softly amongst themselves, came the tinkling jingle of the metal bells worn around the knees of the lion-hunters.

Up to now, beyond a hurried greeting when he first arrived, Kama the chief had found very little time to speak to Naju again, but seeing that he still stood, an interested spectator by the entrance, he sent one of his men to bid him come across and take a place by his side.

As Naju accompanied by Yidahonga stepped up on to a raised dais in front of the chief's hut, Kama again smilingly held out his hand.

"It pleased me greatly a moment ago," he said, "to see the look of admiration on your face as you stood watching the people, for it promises well for the success of a plan we have in view."

"Yes," answered Naju, "these warriors of yours are really splendid, and are well worthy of any man's admiration. What is more, it occurred to me to-day, as it has done many times before since living amongst you, that I have never yet encountered men more fitted to make perfect soldiers; for although they are strong and fearless, they are never greedy or cruel. An army of them, under the guidance of a proper general, would assuredly go forth to certain victory."

"That too has long been my thought," answered Kama, "and if all goes as we hope this day, then the time is not far distant when I shall actually see this army setting forth as you say."

The last words interested Naju very much, and he would have liked to ask Kama the meaning of them. However he was given no opportunity to do so then, for at that moment the crowd in front of them separated.

Loud cries of "Greeting, O Sandwana!" rang out in every direction, and through their midst stepped a lordly eland, whilst seated on its back, smilingly acknowledging the greetings flung at him, sat a young sunny-haired white boy. On either side of him walked his bodyguard, a score of more of splendid morans, bedecked in waving plumes and carrying their great spears.

As Sandwana slipped to the ground and stepped up on to the raised dais, one of the attendants caught the eland by its bridle and led it away, and a second afterwards, surrounded by a circle of chiefs and watched by thousands of eyes, Naju

"GREETING, O SANDWANA."

Facing p. 260.

and Sandwana faced each other. Bending his head, the tall handsome black Prince, clad in his leopard skin robe, gazed earnestly into the face of the sturdy, broad-shouldered boy, clothed on his part in a silky-haired black and white monkey-skin garment. They were in striking contrast and made a handsome picture.

As the wide blue eyes of Sandwana glanced up and met the deep serious gaze fixed on him, he first smiled and then held out his hand, and that handclasp was the beginning of a fast friendship that was to live through many a long year.

Waiting until the murmur of approval that greeted this action had died away, Kama, the chief, now stepped forward and placed himself in front of Naju. He then spoke in a voice so loud and clear that the words were easily heard and understood by even the people standing on the outskirts of the crowd.

"O great Prince," he began, "many a moon has passed since you came to stay in our midst, and as you are aware, from the very first day we took you into our hearts. You have since learnt all that we ourselves know of the customs and history of our tribe, also you have seen our country from end to end and know how beautiful and wonderful it is.

"Up to this time we have been content to live as a simple people, happy with our flocks and herds. But since hearing of the marvellous things that have befallen you since leaving your father's kingdom, a change has come over our feelings, and we are beginning to realise that there is another and

wider world outside these highlands on which we live.

"To make it possible for us to venture out and see this world for ourselves, it will first be necessary to appoint a supreme leader to guide and advise us, one moreover who is not only strong and brave, but who has also some certain knowledge of rulership. There is only one such man that we know of worthy to fill so important a position, and that is yourself. Therefore in the name of the great tribe of which I am a humble chief, will you not become that ruler?"

For a few moments Naju made no reply, for to tell the truth he was stricken dumb with the suddenness of this proposal and the thought that these people should desire him to become their King. And yet—was it not exactly what he had hoped for when setting out on his journey of adventure? And had he not solemnly promised Aruscha, his mother, to find just such a kingdom for himself?

"Where again," he asked himself, "would he ever discover such a beautiful country, or such a magnificent race of people over which to rule?"

Raising his head, he gazed around at the vast crowd of people only to find that every eye was fixed eagerly on his face. Even his own following, standing grouped together below, urged him with ardent glances.

Next he turned to Sandwana, only to meet a beaming look of approval and trust in the wide blue eyes.

So he turned back to the waiting chief and made his reply in a few simple words.

"As you have seen fit to ask me, then I will be your King," was all he said.

But it was enough for the waiting crowd. Holding their spears high in the air, one deafening roar of cheering followed another.

CHAPTER XV

Naju, King of the Craters

As is always the way with men who live in the wilds face to face with nature, the morans of the kraal, where Naju had taken up his abode, were strong silent men, who only talked when they really had something to say, and then used as few words as possible. Such things as gossip or tittle-tattle they considered to be beneath them, and a pastime for their women only.

Thus it was that the particular moran, who was appointed by his comrades to tell Naju of the white boy's existence, only half finished his tale. Had it been left to the chief, Kama, or even to one of the ordinary tribesmen, they would have said that if ever a youth was born to the purple it was Sandwana!

The moran, for example, had failed to tell Naju that every chief of the tribe, and there were well over a thousand of them all told, looked upon the white boy as his own son, and from that day, sixteen years ago, when both his parents had closed their eyes on the world, they had vied with each other in guarding his welfare and watching over his interests, for this was no more than the truth.

During the first months of his life, when he most needed a woman's care, the wife of one of the biggest chiefs had set aside her own lusty infant to be

fed on the milk from the herd, while she herself suckled the little tender stranger at her own liberal breasts.

Several years passed, and then came a period when the active mind of this child of civilised parents called for sterner tuition than his foster-mother could give him. Then again the chiefs stepped in and took it upon themselves to teach him the code of right and wrong as they knew it.

Of such things as the making and understanding of strange signs on paper, that his own father would have taught him had he lived, they knew nothing; but by their own example these savage men taught Sandwana the value of keeping his own strong body clean and healthy, also that fear is mere imagination and does not exist if a thing be bravely faced and understood.

And these wise men, with the thought ever in their minds that to hamper a man-child with galling petty restrictions is to hinder the growth of his soul, picked out some youths of his own age and sent him away in their keeping to spend the days in the sunshine, amongst the birds and animals in the crater, or to climb the circle of steep cliffs that surrounded it.

Had Sandwana been the child of vicious or low-bred parents, then this life of untrammelled freedom, with every soul around anxious to do his bidding, might by chance have turned him into a selfish and arrogant being, but the blood of his sane strong-minded father mingled equally in his veins with that of a gentle, clean-souled mother.

and that, combined with the simplicity of his life and the very example of the wild creatures amongst which he lived, resulted in a youth with a mind too noble to conceal one mean, small or petty thought.

Immediately after the death of the white boy's father, slaves had been chosen and set to take care of the dwelling which he had built when he first came amongst them, and others to attend to the fields and plantations, that they might be in readiness for the boy when he should reach a more mature age.

Small homesteads and villages had sprung up as year by year these same slaves had married and begot families, and under their care the plantations had thrived and spread until they now covered many thousands of acres.

These same gardens and plantations were beautiful beyond compare, for the dead white man had loved and delighted in his fields, and not only planted and tended every kind of fruit and flower that grew in the country, but had sent away to his own and other lands for seeds. Then to feed on the generous harvest of luscious fruits and seeds or to search for fat grubs in the newly-turned soil, came droves of birds both large and small, and finding that the white man never by any chance drove them away, but, stranger still, loved to see them there, the Māsai set themselves to capture the young of the rarer and more timid kinds, as well as many animals, and brought them to him as gifts.

Here it was, in the house built by his father and surrounded by everything that was beautiful and

rare, that Sandwana spent the greater part of his time, watched over by a bodyguard of the finest and bravest morans that the tribe boasted. And now to add to the happiness of this youth the time had come when the chiefs considered him old enough to take an actual share in the affairs of the tribe. Be it only a question of moving the herds to fresh feeding grounds, the trial of a cattle thief or even the settling of some of the many domestic disputes, a seat would be kept for him amongst the council, and he would arrive at the appointed time and place mounted on one of the wild animals that had been specially trained to carry him, and with his escort of stalwart morans trotting behind armed with spear and shield.

Just in this way had he come to the last great council when the most powerful and wealthy chiefs, as well as the minor ones, had gathered together in one of the larger kraals at Kama's bidding, to hear the true story of the stranger that had arrived in their midst.

Seated on the ground in a wide circle, these men had listened silently to every word that fell from Kama's lips, and then, at last, he had laid before them his own idea—that a tribe so large and rich as the Māsai now were needed a supreme ruler, and that there was no man living more fitted to become that ruler than this same Naju, the stranger Prince about whom they had now heard the whole truth

This was a very important question to these chiefs, and it took them many days to make up their minds, but with the white boy it was

different. Seated in the front row of the circle of men, where he could plainly hear every word, he never for one instant doubted the wisdom of the plan.

So eager was Kama to convince his audience and make them see eye to eye with him over this matter, that he told the tale of the stranger's life from the very beginning, and as he had heard it from the lips of the bearers. Thus the chiefs learnt that Naju's father was one Dungundega, a great King, and that his mother was this same King's favourite and most beautiful wife. They heard too the tale of his upbringing, and how at the age of fourteen he had been given a large following of slaves, and sent away to face the world for himself and perchance find a kingdom of his own.

Next came the story of his adventures—of how he had himself led a band of men and attacked and defeated a colony of giant apes who were the enemies of the tribe in whose country they lived. Then followed the story of how the people of Seramani's village had been rescued from the toils of a troup of man-eating lions solely through Naju's initiative.

So the tale went on—how this noble youth had led his following over mountains and lakes, swamps and plains, until he had come at last to the hills leading up to the Giant Volcanoes, and there his party had been attacked by a herd of savage female elephants and more than half of their number destroyed, including Kolilo, an albino chief from the plains, who had taken it upon himself to be their guide.

There was no need to dwell on the facts of Naju's life since he came amongst them, for Kama knew his own people well enough to be aware that every action on the part of his royal guest had been carefully noted and the news passed from village to village.

So fired was the white boy Sandwana over all he heard, that if the momentous decision had lain with him alone, he would undoubtedly have hurried straight away the next instant to see Naju and put the question to him. But the sluggish minds of some of the older men worked more slowly, and had it not been for the eager prompting of Sandwana it is doubtful if they would ever have come to a decision at all.

Then one morning a last meeting was called, and to his great joy Sandwana heard the chiefs declare that they were now ready and willing to acclaim Naju their King. As was to be expected, this in turn led to another vexed question.

Where and how could the festivities fitting enough to celebrate so important a ceremonial be held ?

To this question however Sandwana was to find an answer, for remembering his own vast plantations, and the gigantic harvest of fruit and grain that could be gathered there, he startled his lifelong friends by promptly declaring that the festivities should be held at his dwelling and nowhere else ! Even before they could hinder him or express their gratitude, this sturdy determined youth was speeding away on his big bull eland to warn his slaves to prepare for the coming of the people.

Having accomplished this errand, he hurried away again, arriving at Kama's kraal in time to greet Naju and later join in the thunderous acclamations with which the tribesmen greeted their new ruler.

Energetic and impulsive at all times, even before the cheering had quite died away, Sandwana had ordered his slaves to lead up two gigantic male elephants. These noble brutes, whose long gleaming ivories were hung with tinkling bells and their grey sides decorated with garlands of gay crimson blossoms, threaded their way slowly through the ranks of excited people until they stopped in front of the dais, where, kneeling down at a word from their keepers, eager hands first assisted Naju and then Sandwana on to their backs.

It was not long before a procession had formed itself, and heading it, as it made its way out of the kraal and across the wide plateau to the foot of the cliffs leading up to the crater, marched the chiefs themselves, followed by the two elephants with their riders, each escorted by many thousands of morans whose floating plumes waved in the breeze whilst the gleaming spears flung back the hot rays of sunshine. At their heels came the rest of the tribesmen, followed by the women and children, and as they hurried along, the wide outstanding collars and metal adornments on the legs and arms of the former tinkled merrily.

The vast multitude, whose well-trained muscles made light of the climb up the steep cliffs, quickly came to the top of the ridge, and there without pause passed over and down the other side, until

they stood at last on the level floor of Ngoro Ngoro, the Father of the Craters. And here, stretching away before their eyes, lay the far-reaching fields and plantations, the planning and laying out of which had been done by the white man many years ago.

The dwelling house itself stood on a small eminence overlooking a gleaming lake and surrounded by wide stretches of greenery, and as the paths that led up to it were narrow and crooked and in many places overgrown, the crowd were driven to separate and approach it in various ways. Thus it came about that Naju and Sandwana—for a time at least—found themselves free of the crowd. Though a pace or two behind them, for they had long since dismounted from their huge steeds, strode Yidahonga, a trifle more burly and ox-like than when he had left his home in the Ruanda, but otherwise unchanged; whilst close behind him again came a pair of small brown figures—for with all these strange happenings who could say what might befall two helpless pygmies, so Amani and Amisi stayed as close as possible to their leader.

But in the heart of this same leader—now no longer a simple Prince, but the ruler of a mighty tribe—lay no thought of fear, only a great gladness that the fates had been kind and helped him to carry out his plans so easily. "Some day," he thought, "his new subjects should learn that their faith in him was not misplaced, for he would never rest until he had made them one of the richest and most powerful tribes in the land. But first and

foremost," he decided, "before he turned his attention to the affairs of his tribe, and the training of the regiments that would be necessary for his purpose, one other thing remained to be done, and that was—the redeeming of the solemn promise made to Aruscha, his mother, that last night before he had started away from his father's kingdom. The promise that was as fresh in his mind to-day as the hour when he made it, and although the difficulties of carrying it out would be very great, he never for an instant doubted that the day would come when Aruscha would arrive in these beautiful highlands and live by his side in freedom and safety for the rest of her life."

These were the thoughts that passed through Naju's mind as he followed Sandwana through the tangled maze of paths. It was wonderful, the sympathy and friendship that had already sprung up between these two, each of them so different; for while Naju delighted in this strong sturdy son of the North, with the brave spirit showing so plainly in the wide blue eyes, Sandwana on his part was happy and content in the thought that this clean-limbed, handsome sable Prince, the tale of whose brave deeds had so filled his mind since first he heard them, would never go far away again. Even if the day should come when Naju should decide to start away on another long journey, then he would leave for a time this home of his father and go with him.

These were the thoughts that occupied the white boy's mind, as with Naju by his side he marched

gaily along, proud of the interest shown by his royal guest in all he saw around him.

They were driven to pause at times by the sheer beauty of some spot confronting them, where the seeds brought by the white man from his own severe northern land had grown to rank luxuriance in this generous tropical clime.

Fields of golden grain swayed in the sunshine, side by side with vast stretches of sugar-cane, whose dark spear-shaped leaves waved backwards and forwards revealing the thick purple canes. Cinnamon, cloves and many sweet-scented spices mingled their fragrance on the sun-drenched air, whilst slim vanilla pods—crushed by passing feet—flung out a delicious perfume. Plots of rich damp soil had been turned and planted with every kind of gourd. Streaky cucumbers, together with golden pumpkins, nestled amongst their own green leaves, whilst gigantic water-melons, ripening on the ground, burst asunder showing their deep pink flesh and centres of glossy black seeds.

The homely tuber family had also found a place in this paradise of growing things, and the vast patches of sweet potatoes alone would have fed an army of many men.

It was all so wonderful that other thoughts were driven out of Naju's head as he followed Sandwana on through field after field of cotton, where female slaves gathered the snow-white bolls and carried them away in heaping panniers to be dyed and woven into fine fabrics.

The plants most noted for their grace and beauty had been planted within the vicinity of the dwelling

house itself, and here flourished groves of oranges and lemons, their branches weighted to the ground with a golden harvest, whilst huge green and yellow butterflies fed on the piles of rotting fruit at the foot of each tree.

Then here also grew endless avenues of stately ferns; cocoanut palms with heavy clusters of sweet green nuts; date palms with long strings of sugary fruit; tall swaying marsh palms, whose graceful fronds had been stripped bare to build the numberless nests of thousands of black and yellow weaver-birds.

These in their turn gave place to slender, silver-leafed aromatic pines; pepper trees with their lace-like foliage; flame trees aglow with huge bunches of gaudy blossoms; and deadly nightshade bushes with their clusters of violet blooms. And when the eyes, wearied with gazing aloft, turning to the ground for relief, they rested on the flowers and shrubs that had been brought from the northern lands. Dense banks of roses—white, pink and yellow—filled the air with fragrance, scattering their petals on the brown soil, whilst below them deep purple violets nodded on the tops of tall stems, seeking to leave behind their lowly state and reach up to the rose blooms above.

But all things must come to an end sooner or later, and at last Sandwana led his little band out of the cool shade of the plantations into the sunlit clearing before the dwelling itself.

Their appearance was greeted by a hail of cheers, as a dense crowd of Māsai—eager to fête their new King—poured across to meet them.

Strong hands lifted Naju and Sandwana on to the shoulders of the morans, and hurried them away to a spot where the chiefs awaited their coming.

These men, although very eager to begin the feasting and celebrations, knew that one other important ceremonial had been arranged to take place before they could do so. In calm, dignified silence they waited while Sandwana disappeared through the open doorway of his dwelling and then came out again, followed by several slaves.

Watched by every eye in that vast assemblage, the white boy made his way across to where Naju stood, and in silence handed him a robe of woven cotton, dyed the same deep crimson as the garment worn by the lion-hunters. Next he took a heavy hide shield and a tall metal spear from the hands of his slaves and handed them to Naju as well.

Sandwana then stepped back a pace, and the eyes of the watching multitude fell on Naju, clad for the first time in the garb of a Māsai warrior.

At this a murmur of approval broke from their lips and swelled into a tumultuous roar of cheering, which again and again echoed from cliff to cliff of that vast crater, causing the herds of wild game, feeding over its clover-clad floor, to lift their heads and gaze around them with startled and wondering eyes.

It was the chiefs themselves who now hoisted Naju on to their shoulders and carried him up on to the flat roof of Sandwana's dwelling, and there,

in view of his new-found subjects, the young King took his place at a mighty banquet which the immense plantations had been ransacked to provide.

On one side of him sat Sandwana, and although the coming years were destined to bring much that was dangerous and difficult into the life of his friend, he never faltered, but in later years—as on this memorable occasion—was to stick un-flinchingly to his place at Naju's right hand.

On the other side sat Yidahonga, that sturdy henchman who had gladly shared the dangers and pleasures of the past, and who at this very moment harboured in his shaven pate a fixed determination to take his share in those of the future also.

A few paces away sat another group who had each played their parts to the best of their ability. A score or more of brawny bearers, with two small pygmies in their midst, sat awaiting the coming of the viands, for time and circumstance made no difference to the appetites of these simple men. What might happen in the future was in the hands of the gods; it was enough for these heedless creatures that the present at least promised to be very bright.

As he waited for the slaves to serve the banquet, King Naju gazed across at the beetling cliffs of Ngoro Ngoro and the dense herds of wild creatures sprinkled across its wide-reaching floor. In his mind's eye he pictured also the mighty herds of cattle feeding on the sunlit plateaus outside the

crater. Then nearer at hand his eyes roamed over the rich plantations—at the present moment overrun by his own swarming subjects, all eagerly engaged in preparing their own share of the feast. And as he looked the thought passed through his mind that it could never again be said that he was Naju the Poor Son.

THE END

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 08815 226 7

NAJU OF THE NILE

3.00

By H. E. BARNS